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MYRA GRAY.

VOL. III.

MYRA GRAY;

OR,

SOWN IN TEARS, REAPED IN JOY.

A Novel.

BY

CHARLES CARLOS-CLARKE,

AUTHOR OF "CHARLIE THORNHILL," "WHICH IS THE WINNER," ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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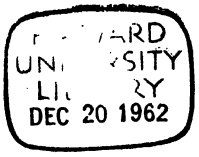

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MYRA GRAY.

CHAPTER I.

THE INSPECTOR VISITS MRS. FERRERS.

WE must go back a few days—a week or two, perhaps. Not, indeed, into some indefinite space which has been left behind, and which the reader has already had time to forget, but simply to that period when Gilbert Ferrers was in the eyes of the world, if not in the eyes of his wife, an honest man. There had been whispers, it is true; but there always will be whispers when Parvenu has pictures, and carriages, and the best still champagne; when he is indifferent to his wife and his home, and prefers truffles and *petits soupers* to the domestic veal, however well served.

There had been rumours, but they had not reached the ears of the person whom they most concerned.

Now they did reach Myra's ears, and they affected her considerably. She could not but suspect the truth of them. She felt the disgrace very acutely; and she knew that, if true, she should feel the inconvenience. That to her was quite a secondary consideration. The first thing was to ascertain, if possible, whether her husband was involved in these calamitous implications, and the second, to what extent. How should she avert them? If from him, well and good; but from herself and family at all hazards. She was not long in learning enough to frighten her.

There was a terrible business in the City. One house fell (metaphorically), then another, and half a dozen consequently followed them. The companies began to go; and the denunciations on their directors were very universal, and loud enough to pervade what is politely called society. Baker Street (not of much consequence in itself) went raving mad; the world of half-pay, military and naval, collected its forces and

besieged Throgmorton Street and the purlieus of the Exchange; poor widows, aged governesses, trustees who had been gambling, passive orphans, and retired tradesmen, were all in one boat. But these persons did not affect the fashionable world, so the fashionable world was at first exceedingly lenient to the perpetrators of these rascalities.

It is astonishing how ignorant women are of business, though their husbands be engaged in it; they are almost as bad as parsons. Myra had no means of testing the truth of what she heard; and Gilbert had not been near her for the last few days. There was nothing odd in that now. Still she might have got from him an approximation to the truth. She would have desired to know whether he was involved; in what circumstances he was involved; and to what extent.

That something was the matter became evident to Myra about this time. It would have been difficult to have said where, when, or how she received the cold shoulder, but she had received it; and taken in connection with certain rumours, it was galling to her.

"Look this way, Isabella, dear, that's Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers."

And though Isabella dear had no notion why she was to look the other way, she did so, like an obedient daughter.

"And what's the matter with her, ma, dear?" said Isabella, simply.

"Oh, they say very odd things about him in the City, my dear; I hope to goodness your father hasn't been drawn in by him. He's very sanguine, I know, about the Aërial Paris and Dover Company; though I think Mr. Ferrers was on the other line—the Tunnel and the Bridge of Boats Company."

So the carriage passed on. There were twenty more little cuts of the same kind. Cuts without which the page of life is very imperfect.

But Myra had some staunch friends too, who loved her for her beauty and her honesty, her good-nature and her truth. Among these, especially conspicuous, were Mrs. Penruddock and Lady Mary Thorncliffe. The two were very different in character, but the result was to Myra nearly the same. They both made her happier than she would have been, because she felt that

her own reputation was not impaired by her husband's defalcations. Mrs. Penruddock would have gone side by side with Myra in her difficulties. She would have helped her, had her with her, exhibited her still in her carriage, and upheld her as her friend. She was capable of that, and that is a great deal. She was incapable of more.

But Myra would not be helped in that way, would not be upheld, would not drag down Mrs. Penruddock, which, as the stronger, she felt somehow she should do without saving herself; and of carriage-driving and public exhibition, she would have none.

"No, my dear Mrs. Penruddock, don't ask me. I cannot be seen in a carriage; nor in silks and satins any more."

"But, Myra, that is nonsense. Why not?"

"Ah! you don't understand."

"Certainly not."

"Then I can't explain. But you are so good; and you have done me all the kindness you can by your generous offer of self-sacrifice."

"Self-sacrifice!" replied the kind-hearted creature, who had arrived at a pitch of excel-

lence by the practice of good deeds, which had become a mere habit of the mind; "it can be no sacrifice. I like to help you and to have you with me."

"I shall only drag you into the mire." At the same time she put her arms round her friend's neck, and told her how valuable was her sympathy. "You have taught me a new truth; it does not require to be tutored in suffering to be able to pity others." Then she went so far as to promise, that if she could make use of her at any time she would.

Lady Mary Thorncliffe was a different woman from Mrs. Penruddock. A little hard, some people thought her; not altogether sympathetic. The verdict was a just one; at least to a certain extent. She would not go into the mire with you, but she would have pulled you out of it, at a great cost. If Myra Ferrers had been given to tears, she would have cried over her skimmed milk with Mrs. Penruddock; with Lady Mary she buckled on her armour for a wholesome struggle. And the difference of her estimation of the services of the two may be measured by the extent of the confidence she bestowed on

them. In the one case it was general, in the other particular to a degree.

"Well, Myra," said Lady Mary, walking brusquely into her room, with an assured air, calculated to impart much courage if wanted. "Well, Myra, this is a bad business." She did not sigh, she did not say "sad" business, but "bad," although it was both; but she called her "Myra" for the first time. It was a characteristic touch of affection which gratified her exceedingly.

"It is bad, very bad: not for me so much as for others, if what I hear is true."

Myra had ceased to feel, and consequently to pretend, much delicacy of regard for her husband. Her real trouble arose from the stain which must rest upon her, and from the straitened circumstances which her duty would impose upon her.

"That's true; but I can't help others, you know, and I can help you." While she spoke Lady Mary's ordinary smile and manner were quite unaltered. She was a woman of a moderate height, of very good figure, usually dressed in dark colours of rich material. Her features

were straight and good, the most remarkable of them being her eyes and teeth; the former were dark and large, the latter white and regular. Nobody said Lady Mary Thorncliffe was pretty, few said she was handsome, and almost everybody quoted her as extremely good-looking. She wanted nothing but complexion to have made her the second of the three. On what a small point sometimes good looks depend. After a pause she continued—"Now tell me, what do you know about the business, and what do you mean to do?"

And Myra replied with little hesitation—

"I know very little. Mr. Ferrers never confided in me on the subject of money; and we have lately never appeared to want it."

"I came here to offer you assistance. Tell me how I can best do so."

"It's difficult to say, Lady Mary; but I would rather have it from you than from any one but a relation. Will you give me your advice?"

"That's the least I can do for you. You bear up bravely, Myra, and that's a good sign."

"I have no reason for regret on my own account, if I can find work to do, and can do it."

Lady Mary did not affect to misunderstand her.

"The world gives you credit for being perfectly safe as regards money."

"The world is, as usual, wrong. I have nothing; and if I had, I should not regard it as my own until every claim upon Mr. Ferrers was paid."

Lady Mary shook her head.

"Nothing! I thought Lord Fitzcourthope——"

"All gone. I believe the lease of this house belongs to me, and the furniture and the pictures."

"And that you call nothing? Come, Myra, things are not so desperate as you described them;" and Lady Mary was beginning a business-like calculation.

"But I cannot use them now. I should never forgive myself, while those hundreds who trusted my husband are exiled or starving."

"That's quixotic."

"It's only honest. I feel as if I were the only creditor that had been paid in full."

"If hundreds were starving, and a loaf would

save one life, would it be wise to divide it into tiny fragments, which could benefit nobody? Besides, you have in some sense a right to this, and more."

"No, Lady Mary. What I gave ceased to be my own; what I am taking belongs to others. But I see we differ. Now, you shall advise me on another point."

"No, Myra, it's impossible to differ from you;" and here, with unwonted demonstration, Lady Mary got up and kissed her, and then sat down again. "I wish you would let me consult Mr. Thorncliffe. I cannot argue the point, but I think you might do better for yourself and for everybody. Have you ever thought what it is to want a home, or a dress, or a dinner—to be dependent upon the workhouse? You have been among the poor, and know them."

Myra grew very pale, for she had thought of it with feelings which shook her sense of right to its foundations.

"Yes; but I shall not want them yet."

"No; not as long as you will accept my assistance. I don't want you to say 'no' in a hurry, Myra. I am not going to send you

round the Park in a carriage, or stick you up at a dinner party to be stared at, or ask you to be my humble companion in any way; but if, for the present, you would like our cottage in the Isle of Wight, take it and welcome. No one will see you, and I can come down and help you to mature your plans, when the Easter recess comes."

It was now Myra's turn to get up and thank her friend, which she did with more eloquence than words convey. What a mysterious affair is a kiss! How many and how various the expressions it demonstrates! the wounds it heals, the passion it implies, the sorrow it shares, the treachery it conceals, and the sincerity it proclaims. There was no other way of thanking so plain-speaking a person as Lady Mary.

"Does that mean an acceptance of my offer?"

"You forget that I have a relation, an aunt, who has always professed a kindness for me, and I believe feels it."

"You are quite right, and now is the time to test it, though I plead against myself."

Before Lady Mary Thorncliffe took her leave

she had succeeded in persuading Myra to promise to use herself and her husband in any negotiations that should be requisite to enter into. That she had done so is apparent from his visit to Deloraine.

"There are but two persons, Lady Mary, to whom I could apply, and perhaps to one of them not directly. I mean Mrs. Treby and—" she hesitated a moment—"and Mr. Deloraine."

"Too young and good-looking," said Lady Mary.

"You forget he was my guardian, though I took myself out of his hands too abruptly."

"Well, then, you are right. It would be a censorious world that could condemn you."

"It is a censorious world, that carries its own bag of faults behind it."

"That is why I am glad you are going to your aunt's to live."

"For the present; but I must do something for myself after a time, and then I shall apply to you again. My husband has been unfortunate, and has dragged down others in his ruin; but that need not prevent me from endeavouring to obtain an honest livelihood."

"*Au revoir*," said Lady Mary, rising. "God bless you, Myra! I must come and see you again in a day or two. Do nothing rashly. You certainly have nothing to reproach yourself with."

That was her adieu. It was a few years before they met again. When Lady Mary next called in Chester Street the bird was flown.

Unfortunate! That was the name which had always been given in polite society to the gentlemen who robbed to the extent of millions. Myra knew no other word for rascality, no other form in which robbery was acceptable. The dirty pickpocket was a criminal, the dog-stealer was a felon; but swindle a whole nation, and you are unfortunate. I wonder what are the people you have swindled? It's always so. Kill one man in a fight—it is manslaughter or murder; kill your thousands—it is glory or a victory.

But Myra and the world did not yet know the worst.

These visits were exceedingly satisfactory; but not so the one we have to record.

Myra sat in her room with a face feverish and

tired with over-much thought. It was as beautiful as ever, and increased in brilliancy by its unnatural colouring. She had been making up her mind, and sternly resolving on independence, whenever she could get it. She would be beholden to her aunt—there was nothing degrading in that—until she found herself in a groove in which she could run alone. She need not be ashamed of her name, for it was only a misfortune to have failed in business, and to have disappeared for a time from a band of howling and hungry creditors.

She had got so far when she heard a stealthy step upon the stairs. It was only evening, not yet night, and Myra felt some fear, but more astonishment, when a man, dressed in a shooting jacket and cap, without whiskers, in blue glasses, and otherwise as little like Gilbert Ferrers as might be, walked into the room.

"Myra," said the man; and then she knew it was her husband.

"Gilbert, at last! What is this? Why are you not in Boulogne, or Paris, or somewhere out of the way?"

"You're an apt scholar, Myra; you speak as you have been taught."

"Only as prudence dictates. You know that's the usual course; you have told me so yourself. You will not expect me to go with you?" she added, but without bitterness.

"And why not? There are more of us there, wives and all."

"Because I wish to go to my aunt for the present; and of what service could I be?"

"Humph!" said Ferrers, without one touch of compunction; "you have the lease of the house, the furniture, and the pictures: more than I had when I started to make millions."

"I have given them up to the creditors. They are in my lawyer's hands already, with my orders. He will attend to no suggestions but mine; so you see I should be but an useless clog."

"Fool!" said Gilbert, in a rage, and looking as disappointed as a hungry tiger of his food, on which some quicker and more far-scenting vulture has already begun to prey. "Fool! it's our only source of living! You are a fool!"

So he said, and some others who have possibly heard of it.

"And who's precious advice is it?"

"Nobody was consulted. I made up my mind when I heard of the ruin your failure had created among innocent persons."

"What do you suppose I gave you the property for?"

"You told me to do as I liked with it, and I have done it. Why are you here?"

"I want money," said Gilbert.

"Not me?" inquired Myra, with some doubts or fears.

"Not now certainly. There may come a time when you'll be more useful."

She remembered these words.

Then she went to an escritoire, the key of which was attached to her watch-chain, and, unlocking it, she took out fifty pounds in notes, and a few sovereigns. "You shall have it," said she, handing it to him.

"Is it all that you have? My journey must be a rapid and a rough one."

"All but that which I must keep to go to my Aunt Treby. There is a little more."

Gilbert Ferrers appeared to make one stride towards the escritoire; then he stopped, doubting the policy of the step, and the submission of his wife. Time too was an object, and habit had just sufficient influence over him to prevent him from committing a robbery with violence upon his own wife. "That will do," said he. "You have acted like a fool. There was enough to have begun again on the other side of the water. Adieu. When I am in safety you shall hear." Without further parley he settled again the arrangement of his glasses and his general disguise, and stealthily descended the stairs. Myra never had so thoroughly despised him; for she almost thought that it added ridicule to the sufficiently tragic nature of their embarrassments.

All this struck the heart of Myra with wonder and dismay. Was it necessary to disguise oneself in this fashion, after being what the world called "unfortunate in business?" Was it necessary to be a mountebank as well as a runagate? Did Messrs. Turnover and Blarney, and Sir Saul Deacon, and Sir Porter Fetcham, put on shovel hats and golden-dyed whiskers,

dirty shirts and sham jewellery, when they went forth to do battle with a world which could not understand them, nor appreciate their accounts—of themselves? Certainly not. Then why should Gilbert Ferrers, of all men, have made such a fool of himself? Myra did not say this, but she thought it. Was not this sort of disguise for the lowest felons, highwaymen, forgers, murderers, and such like? And then her heart beat audibly. To be sure, there have been disguises on other grounds. "Political offences are almost honourable," said she to herself. The Fenians had scarcely been heard of; but she knew that a former Attorney-General had made an escape from Bristol disguised—yes, in a clean shirt. So she hoped for the best.

She was startled by a knock at the street-door about fifteen minutes after her husband had left her. It was a tolerably decisive sort of knock too, which rather demanded than asked for admittance. "Would Mrs. Ferrers step down into the dining-room?" And she did so, to confront a policeman.

The man's manner was respectful, as it

usually is in the presence of ladies, upon the same principle that his figure is upright, his voice sonorous, and his face clean and glistening. These things are necessary to the genus policeman: they always are so, and constitute somewhat of his idiosyncrasy. The present was an inspector; and he was attended by two satellites. He had no touch of pity in his voice or manner; but his respect for Myra answered the same purpose. It was almost compassionate, as he said, "Mrs. Ferrers, ma'am, I believe?" looking at his boots, of which there was plenty to look at. He then went on to explain his mission in language simple beyond the possibility of a mistake, while Mrs. Ferrers stood and looked at him, scarcely well knowing what he said. It was not the words she could not understand, but the fact; for she would mix it up with her husband's professional duties.

"A felony, ma'am; and he's supposed to be concealed somewhere on the premises. He's been tracked here; and, as it's a felony, we're bound to search the house."

Myra made no opposition; indeed, she made no sort of reply. The servant was in attendance

to go with Mr. Inspector Butt. So he and his two myrmidons ascended the stairs. The reader will understand that the search was ineffectual.

Myra sat still, wondering what it could be. A felony was a charge of an indefinite kind to her; but she knew it involved heavy penalties and dire disgrace. Were not thieves, shop-lifters, sheep-stealers, and such men, felons? Surely Gilbert had not yet anything to do with these.

Presently the man returned. He seemed to have been into every hole and corner, up the chimney, down the sink, into the coal-hole, and round the dust-bin. He was hot and ill-tempered in proportion. "Well, ma'am, he ain't there now, at all events." And saying this he straightened the cuffs of his coat, and made an ample brush of his hat.

"I should have told you so, if you had asked me."

"Ain't hevidence, ma'am. Couldn't a'took your word." Myra, not understanding the man, bridled up, as she arose, and was about to leave the room. "You ain't seen Mr. Ferrers, I suppose, ma'am?"

"I don't think my word can be more valuable in the one case than the other. What do you want with him?"

"Warrant for his apprehension. Forging of foreign bills. His 'complices is took. There's nothin' to be got by concealin' the matter now. They'll all be up before the magistrates to-morrow morning. It's a strong case, ma'am; but there's no need for you to criminate no one. He isn't here, that's quite sartain. Your servant, ma'am. Sorry to ha' disturbed you about so unpleasant a business."

Myra's night was a bad one. She had now but little information from the police. A felony, a forgery of foreign bills. What could be the meaning of it all. She thought he was a director, a chairman, a manager, a great man, but an unfortunate, perhaps a criminal one. Now he was a forger, a felon; and could be sought for all over the country by power of a search-warrant. She would willingly have obtained information, if she possibly could; but to whom could she apply. She had not been out; that was a comfort to her. The wife of a felon, however innocent herself, was certainly

out of place in Mrs. Penruddock's carriage or in her own.

She had no doubt now that she was in a bad case; and the more she was glad to have given instructions to Mr. Weyland for a proper dispersion of her property. "They'll forgive me and believe me when they know what I've done for them, and how soon it was done. But if what that wretched man said is true, I have no longer any name. I will go without it. I will once more be Myra Gray. Would God I had never been ought else! I will return to the old home, splashed, muddied, fatigued, and repentant, and will look for repose there, as Myra Gray!" She did not think one thing: that it would have been very awful had she continued to love him, as many women would have done. What a pang she was spared!

The next morning she was sure to have the newspapers; and she awoke from a feverish and fitful morning's sleep to think first of them. She rang her bell, to which there was no answer. Her maid, who doated on her, and the footman, who admired her as much as anything beyond his own legs, were laying their heads

together at that moment over the morning paper. The result was a tremendous mixture of ideas on the subject. "How shall we be able to keep it from missus?" said the Abigail, who was not sufficiently high in service to be heartless. "It ain't the place," says John, looking down — "there's plenty o' them, thanks to hemmigration and the hinflux o' gold. But how about our present wages?" "What a thing to have to say, when we're asked for our last place, Dora. Who's to give us a character?" And no doubt this last question of the cook's was a puzzler. John hoped that he would not give them his own; and then the maid (one who had been raised from the ranks in Myra's economical days) stopped it all by recurring to the original point. "Never mind your wages; but how shall we prevent missus from seeing it? Dear heart alive! There's his name and all."

There was his name and all, and several other names, and one which struck home to poor Myra's heart a cruel and foul blow: one she had half foreseen, but which she had scarcely believed in until now that it had come. There

seemed to be no doubt about it; Gilbert Ferrers was a felon. He was not taken yet, if that could be any sort of gratification to his well-wishers; but he certainly would be, which was satisfactory to those who believed him guilty before his trial. And so many believed that; for he had made all men his enemies, and none his friends.

"Where is the newspaper, Dora?" said Myra, coming into her dressing-room, pale and tired, but bearing up manfully (womanfully, shall we say? for it's more in their line), and hoping that no one yet suspected the half of his guilt.

A good, sharp maid is an excellent thing in woman; and if you go for ready lying (real inventive powers they call it in my profession), it would be difficult to beat them; so Dora at once answered—

"Please, ma'am, they've not come yet."

"Then the papers are later than I am. That's too bad."

"Yes, ma'am;" but Dora's face did not tell lies quite so well as her tongue.

"Desire John to go out and buy one—a *Times*."

"Yes, ma'am;" and her face was scarlet as

she ran out of the dressing-room, to which she shortly returned with the identical paper they had so lately inspected, neatly folded, and with the police intelligence inside.

And then Myra read the account of her husband's suspected forgeries, of his known accomplices, of one Percy Hardman, who had been taken, and of the guilty participation of a foreign lady of great personal attractions, Mathilde von Robeck, *alias* Mrs. Bransome, *alias* Mrs. Ferrers; and having thus far ascertained her husband's guilt and her own degradation, she dropped the paper, and, while burning tears of shame and self-reproach for her youthful folly and infatuation coursed one another down her cheeks, she vowed never more to see or hear of him, nor to bear a name so shattered, so broken with disgrace.

CHAPTER II.

THE FELONS AT WORK.

THE means by which the complication of disorders had been effected was very simple. Abstractedly it might be summed up in one word—extravagance. But extravagance may exist without such wholesale depravity as that which accompanied the fall of Gilbert Ferrers. Living beyond one's income is so mild a term, such a scarlatina for fatal results, that nobody thinks of it now-a-days but as a venial offence, gilded by high example, and indulged in by all.

Every age has its reigning weakness, strong enough to eclipse all others; so that its weakness is its strength. The fatal malady which overshadows the present time is an indifference

to that fine old-fashioned independence which looked every man in the face, because it owed no man anything beyond the debts which we all owe to one another. Perhaps it made us more proud, less trading, less democratic; for the great man who is indebted to nobody is a great man indeed. What a trumpery, rotten piece of rag must that nobility be which is afraid to meet a grocer or a milliner face to face, and which must be hail fellow well met with a betting man or a horse dealer, because it can pay its debts neither of honour nor of necessity. To say that it weakens and enslaves is to say nothing. Call it competition, love of show, ambition, grandeur; worship it as generosity, liberality, carelessness of money—what you will; it makes no difference: it is, indeed, a disregard for the happiness and just claims of your fellow-creatures, and a culpable negligence of the first duty you owe to yourself and your reputation.

But it is not necessary that everybody who lives beyond his income should go quite the length of Gilbert Ferrers. Let us hope they may fall short of his first steps. A deliberately formed purpose of opening his oyster with any

knife was the original feature in his proceedings, and his success at length attracted attention. It was not an attention marked by that flattery which success in some walks of life will give. It was a curious and almost unprecedented success; for he had literally risen from the ranks. The Napiers had their name before them; Arthur Wellesley was not unknown, even as an ensign; Gladstone sat at the feet of great men; John Bright invented or bought a splendid method of carpet ornamentation; and Disraeli's father wrote even better books than himself.

But Gilbert Ferrers was a self-made man, by which, as the Americans say, he removed a weight of responsibility from the shoulders of Providence, and it therefore became necessary that the eye of the public, and of the police, should be upon him.

But it is not to be imagined that the eye of the police is intended to fix itself on those servants of public companies who, having but four hundred a year, live hardly upon eight thousand. Not so, indeed; as witness, while I write, one Benjamin Higgs, Esq., or, rather, we might witness him, if we could catch him.

It was certainly nothing to Policeman A 1 that Gilbert Ferrers, having ostensibly nothing, chose to have horses and broughams, and all the metaphorical sheep and oxen, he-asses and she-asses, men-servants and women-servants in the world of fashion. Why should it be? What are directors and committee-men and share-holders themselves about, if they will not look after their own business? And we know that they do, we have so many instances of it. How sedulously they lock the stable door after the horse has been stolen! And why? *Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?* Who shall look after the inspectors themselves?

But there came a time in the City when, all things taken together, that ever-wakeful eye began to reflect its light upon the doings of Gilbert Ferrers. It saved no victims, because, of course, its duty is not to prevent crime, but to stand by and (seeing being believing) to take it up upon committal of the theft. Heavens! when the blow did come, what a shell of combustibles the police and the detectives proved to have been, and what self-restraint they must have had not to have burst before! They knew

everything. They watched his frauds; they winked at his peculations; they guarded his web intact, until it was full of flies, and then they broke it, and found most of his victims dead.

"Why, bless your heart!" says Lombard Street, "he's been at it for years, he has."

"At what?" says Capel Court.

"Living upon other people. Why, he never had but a few hundreds, and those were his wife's, and he must ha' spent six or seven thousand a year. Everybody knows it."

"Then why did they let him go on?"

"Ah, that's it! Liberty of the subject. But now we've got him safe enough: he's committed a forgery."

"And you've just found it out?"

"Bless you, no! Just found it out! He's been at it for months, and we shall take him to-day. We've got the lot of them—the woman and all."

And this satisfactory intelligence was imparted to the Chief Magistrate, when a good many people had been ruined by the issue of forged bills. But we're going to cure them by

getting the lot; and cure is a great deal better than remedy, you know. We find it so in petty larceny and great felony; it's all the same. "Wait till he has murdered the footman, my lord, and then we'll take him up for the burglary."

The whole thing began with whispers: it always does; and then it goes on to a subdued murmur. The subdued murmur becomes louder and louder, and at last it makes the culprit cringe. And when he loses his brass, his gold is sure to follow; the two have gone hand in hand. It would not do to murmur too loudly while a man had his brass and gold to the fore; so it waits till he has begun to tremble, and then it comes down upon him, as it should upon guilty men. And now it burst into a roar.

"I knew it," says one. "Devilish glad of it," says two. "Conceited beast," says three. "It's half ruined my grandmother," says four. "What is it?" says five. "Forgery," says six. "I always said so," says seven. And as seven never had said so, but probably intended to say so after the event, he got no credit for his powers of vaticination.

However, that was the accusation. Never mind how many persons had been ruined by following his lead, or lending him money. A railway king may die and get up again, only he must not come into the sunshine. There's a snug corner, doubtless, for resuscitated princes, as retired as a corner in Westminster Abbey. But forgery is a specific mistake which cannot be corrected nor ignored. And of this Gilbert Ferrers was suspected, with four or five other persons more or less known to the police.

It had been long more than suspected. The City police were urged by the City solicitor, who had the gravest doubts at first whether a man spending so much money, director of so many undertakings, husband of so well-known a wife, and so irreproachable in his appearance and toilette, could be the man. How we all believe in whited sepulchres! Had they not made a mistake, these A 1, 2, 3, and 4, with their detective sergeant at their head? No, they had not. They had plain evidence that Percy Hardman, Gustav Streuvelpeter, George Dobson, Sigismund Klapp, and Gilbert Ferrers, were engaged in

extensive forgery of foreign bills. They knew their haunt; they knew some of their associates on the Continent; they knew that an old acquaintance had already eighteen months ago been convicted and punished, without stopping it. They did not then take them, because a premature movement might have frightened them all. Now was the time, and they set about it *con amore.*

Where was the den? On the afternoon of the day which we have described in the last chapter, when Mrs. Penruddock, Lady Mary Thorncliffe, Gilbert Ferrers, and the detective, had all called upon Myra Ferrers, four persons were assembled in a dingy back room in a small court off Lombard Street. It was devoid of furniture, if we except a couple of chairs and two tables. Both the latter were furnished with deep drawers. A large chest was placed against the wall, and the room had the appearance of an unused office. The men in it were not remarkable, with one exception. Percy Hardman retained his coarse, hard, vulgar expression; he stood leaning against the wall, with his hands in his pockets, all former trace of regard for Gilbert Ferrers, or

the conventionalities of life, having disappeared by degrees. Gustav Streuvelpeter was a dark, sombre fanatic, pale and thin, with black beard and moustaches, with a strong *soupçon* of the political adventurer. Sigismund Klapp was as white as his countryman was black, as large in build as *he* was small, as hairless and as blue-eyed, as heavy and self-indulgent looking as Streuvelpeter was the reverse. George Dobson was a delicate-looking man, of some intellectual pretension; with no higher characteristics than ordinary, but with better and cleaner hands. His appearance, indeed, was that of an ordinary merchant, or stockbroker's clerk. He sat at one of the tables, and wrote under the dictation of Gustav Streuvelpeter. The exception was Gilbert Ferrers. He was not as we have seen him before. He wore a beard and moustaches, which he did not on ordinary occasions. He had in his hand a pair of blue spectacles. His coat and waistcoat were lying on a chair, and in their place he had on a dark-coloured velveteen shooting jacket. He spoke for a few moments earnestly to George Dobson, and then placed himself opposite to Streuvelpeter.

"You say you have reason to believe that suspicions are aroused?"

"I do say so." Saying which Streuvelpeter turned, if possible, a shade paler.

"Your reasons?"

"I have seen a suspicious character lurking about here for two days; and this afternoon I saw him again, as I came in. He pretended not to see me."

"Klapp, you hear what he says. Have you any of the documents locked up here—the blank forms or dies?"

"All excepting those which are in circulation."

"They must be destroyed, then, immediately; here—now directly."

The fire was alight, but the gas was not burning, though it was almost dark.

"No, no!" replied Klapp, "not so; we are too much in a hurry. Where is the danger? I for one will not destroy them for such a bugbear." And he laughed. The room was at the back of the house, and its dingy windows looked only on a blank courtyard, surrounded by a wall.

"I don't know your idea of a bugbear, but"—and here Ferrers put his hand into the shooting-jacket pocket and drew out a pistol—"if I detect one symptom of foul play, by heavens I'll blow your brains out, and save——"

"Ferrers, Ferrers!"—and Percy Hardman stepped in between them—"there's no foul play; I believe Streuvelpeter has been mistaken. Who's to know anything about it? This is only an office, Klapp's office, look at his cigar boxes; he's a foreign agent for a Frankfort house. If you destroy all the plant, you clear us out for ever."

During which speech, however, Ferrers had locked the door on the inside and put the key in his pocket.

"Stay, Ferrers, perhaps it is so," said Dobson, jumping up from the table; "and as to locking the door, it's fatal if they do come. Besides, it's out of the question now; it's too late——"

At that moment he stopped and held his breath, as did Ferrers himself. A footstep, then another, then another, sounded stealthily on the wooden stairs. Was it possible? The blank faces of all affirmed its probability.

"Hush!" said Percy Hardman, holding his

breath, while Ferrers again slowly drew forth the pistol. He was about to speak. His face assumed a hard, rigid expression of hatred, not common to it, as he hissed out—

"I told you so. I knew it would come to this; but I'm not to be sold like a bird in a cage. Move the chest, Dobson; we'll run for it."

Dobson moved the only piece of furniture in the room, and disclosed a low and narrow door, leading to an empty room, from which was an easy descent by an old bottle-rack to the yard. At the same moment a hand was placed on the door, and admittance demanded. There was no mistaking the summons.

I said the door was locked, and Ferrers had the key. Hardman, not trusting himself to speak, pointed to it and signed to him to open it. He turned, however, again abruptly upon Klapp, with his pistol in his hand. At the same moment, Hardman, fearing for the life of their accomplice, and cognisant of the danger to them all, of such a catastrophe, struck up the arm of Gilbert Ferrers. The pistol exploded, and the bullet entered the wall. The shot was scarcely

fired, when he disappeared behind the chest, and climbing out of the window, made his way to the yard, now almost dark from the shades of night and fog. The sound, too, was not lost upon the police, who ceased all further request for admission, and with one violent effort burst open the door. A sharp whistle brought two more, who had been standing below, at once to the spot.

"To the back door, Johnson, beyond the court; one of 'em's gone." The man was down stairs like lightning, but he had no chance with Ferrers; and when he reached it the bird was flown, and the back gate ajar. No one else had followed. The rush made by the police had been so sudden, the pistol shot had so astonished the rest of them, who were quite unprepared for it, that no attempt at defence or concealment could be made. The fact of the policeman waiting to capture the next fugitive, and of those inside securing the prisoners whom they had made, gave Gilbert Ferrers more chance of escape.

We see how he had employed the time. He got home without detection: he left it, too,

without detection; and that very evening he managed to reach Calais, for the present safe from pursuit.

Not to leave the reader under any misapprehension, Ferrers would have shot his accomplice, Sigismund Klapp, had he believed firmly in the foul play, or in its successful results. At the time the pistol went off he had no intention of doing so. Knowing how very disadvantageous to their pleadings, and how detrimental to their cause the explosion would be, and how utterly inexplicable, but on grounds of attempted murder, he had not hesitated to avail himself of his superior activity and presence of mind to escape. There were reasons for believing that he had been sold, as far as Klapp was concerned. Some passages in that scoundrel's life in relationship to Mathilde von Robeck had not been satisfactorily explained, and jealousy had something to do with Gilbert Ferrers' prejudices against his accomplice. It was utterly unfounded as far as the woman was concerned, but his nationality gave a colour to his imagination, and Mathilde's restlessness and desire for change strengthened the prejudice.

Whilst Gilbert Ferrers pursued his way swiftly along the least frequented streets, the police had overpowered (indeed, there was no resistance) the rest of the gang. They were removed in custody, to be brought before the magistrates on the morrow. Klapp had no further reasons for reticence, and denounced the fugitive in unfeigned and natural anger. If he were an honest scoundrel, unjustly accused, no one can blame him. A slip of paper found in the coat-pocket of Gilbert Ferrers himself disclosed the complicity of Mathilde, so little had they hitherto suspected that their rascalities were found out. Hence the long paragraph in the *Times*, which left nothing to be conjectured as to the persons implicated in the most extensive frauds that had been perpetrated for many years.

On Thursday evening they had been taken: on the following morning they were before the magistrates; and by Saturday, assured of her disgrace, and determined upon her line of conduct, Myra Ferrers was on her way to Mrs. Treby.

The examination was not without its interest. The features of the case were peculiar, and

appealed to society beyond the mere mercantile view of the transactions.

The names have already been given, and no *alias* was pleaded to retard the proceedings. The prisoners, without exception, were described as well-dressed. A tattered felon is but a sorry object. He looks as if he ought to be in the dock. What business have rags at large to elbow silks and satins? They were also well educated; that is, those who spoke English did so grammatically. A foreign scoundrel is as fashionable as a foreign singer, and a foreign accent tinges the plainest truths or most unvarnished lies with romance. They were also undefended, as injured innocence should be. Conscious rectitude wants no other armour. Wig and gown, and whatever brains belong to them, are then thrown away. The chief magistrate listened, as none but chief magistrates can listen, to uncontrovertible platitudes. And is he not paid to do so?

The solicitor opened the business, and stated in effect the following facts. That it was a grave offence in a mercantile community: the gravest. Worse than the abduction of a wife or

child. Was not this a city where mammon was worshipped above all things? and this offence was a fraud upon that worship. He did not exactly say this, he only implied it. That commerce depended upon bills of exchange: fictitious paper had been manufactured to an enormous amount. Was not an accomplice convicted in the previous year some months before? These prisoners had been long engaged in systematic acts of forgery.

"Here are," said Mr. Jobling, holding out his hand full of paper, "I don't know how many bills of exchange, fabricated in the last three months, for all sorts of sums, varying from a thousand to a hundred pounds in value. They bear thirty or forty different signatures, are drawn in French, German, Spanish, and English, and purport to be from half the countries of the civilised world. It is a wonderful business, of great ingenuity and industry: the work, I regret to say, of cultivated minds. They are difficult of detection to ordinary persons; but the natural acuteness of your lordship's mind will see through them at once." Here Mr. Jobling bowed towards the civic chair, and the chief

magistrate, who (strange to say) was not impervious to flattery so nicely administered, smiled, looked at the forgeries upside down, and replied—

"Undoubtedly; but not obvious to every capacity. Half the ingenuity would have sufficed to gain a splendid position." He settled his robes, and made it pretty evident that he meant his own. The idea, too, was so new, that it was received with a murmur of applause.

"Silence!" said the usher.

"There must be no demonstration in the court," said his lordship, blandly. "Justice can dispense with popular approbation. Proceed, Mr. Jobling."

Mr. Jobling did so at once. "Yes, my lord; these bills are engraved for the express purpose, and with the name of the drawer on the margin in the usual way. They have an English firm as acceptors, stamped by a die, and are to all appearance as genuine as—as—the—the decorations on your lordship's person, or—or—the—the sun at noon day."

His lordship felt the homage so delicately conveyed.

"In conclusion, my lord, before calling the necessary evidence, I may add that these forgeries have been systematic; that they have been committed within, ay, almost a stone's throw of your lordship's dining-room windows, I mean of the great justice-room of this noble edifice; that bills in all forms, perfect and imperfect, have been found; dies, with the names of various firms; hundreds of blank forms, cheques, books, and counter-foils have been all seized, and the prisoners now before your lordship have been taken red handed."

"One, and one only," he continued, "has escaped; but he is known to the police, and at the close of the investigation a warrant for his apprehension will be applied for. Your lordship, no less than society at large, will be astonished when I state that Gilbert Ferrers is involved in these forgeries; and from evidence which has fallen into the hands of the police, and which will be laid before your lordship, there can be no doubt that he and a woman named Mathilde, *alias* Mrs. Bransome, have been in the closest relationship to one another, and to the prisoners

before you. I shall to-day call the officers who arrested the prisoners, and apply for a remand; after which the whole of the gang will be formally charged with forgery, and with the illegal possession of the implements necessary for their purpose."

Mr. Jobling wiped his face and sat down, after a peroration on the advantages of honesty and the employment of talents, which would have made Whittingtons of the City apprentices, who were not there to hear him; and Detective Sergeant Hodder was called.

Sergeant Hodder was a perfect police officer, and managed to speak the truth with so much circumstance that to the uninitiated it appeared like a lie. The fact is, the truth was not worthy of so much effort. No wonder that he told the story of the capture, from the placing of the men outside of the door to the flight of the escaped accomplice Ferrers. He only forgot to mention his neglect of the back door from the courtyard. "We went up-stairs," said he; "the door was locked; we heard whispering, then a scuffle, then a pistol shot."

"How do you know it wasn't a gun?" inquired

the prisoner Dobson, to which Hodder made no reply.

"Silence, sir; you will have an opportunity of interrogating the witness presently. Go on, Hodder," said his lordship.

"Hearing the shot," he was more cautious now, "we broke open the door at once. I told 'em who I was, and that I was come to take them. Meantime Johnson ran round to the back, but Ferrers was gone."

"Has nothing more been heard of him?"

"Not yet, your lordship; but there's no doubt about taking him, if there's a remand."

"Tell his lordship what was found on the prisoners and in the room, Hodder."

"Certainly, sir. Streuvelpeter said he was a cigar agent for a Frankfort house. We found no cigars: all the boxes were dummies. We searched the tables and the desk. In the latter we found the bills produced. On one the ink was still wet. It is dated Philadelphia."

"But you say the ink was wet when you found it. How was that?"

"That's just it, your lordship. Couldn't a been drawn in Philadelphia."

"Just so—just so. Go on, Mr. Hodder, if you please." And Mr. Hodder went on.

"We found several more. There were also several dies with names of City firms and banks, and foreign companies on them."

"What countrymen do the prisoners profess to be?"

"Two of them have German names, and they can't speak English this morning."

"Can't speak English this morning? What do you mean, Hodder?"

"They spoke it well enough last night; for me and my men heard 'em. But close confinement's took away their speech."

"I thought caged birds always talked best and sung smallest," remarked his lordship, at which the solicitors, clerks, police, and audience laughed, as in duty bound, until the crier shouted "Silence!" And they were all as decorously behaved as ever. "Any more evidence to offer to-day, Mr. Jobling?"

"Nothing more. We shall apply for a remand. In the meantime the case is in the hands of the sergeant-inspector. And a note which he found in the coat-pocket of the accomplice,

Ferrers, implicates the woman, whether with a guilty knowledge or not your lordship is the best judge, or whether only as involuntary *particeps criminis*. She is not in attendance; but, I presume, your lordship will remand the prisoners for a few days, by which time we hope both she and her paramour will be forthcoming."

This was the startling evidence which appeared in the morning papers, and which Dora and John had so charitably plotted to conceal from their mistress: without success. Nor can we be surprised at the effect which the intelligence produced upon her.

A sort and decisive interview with Mr. Weyland, which his sense of expediency was not strong enough to guide, and she went forth into the world, to begin it once more, beggared in fortune and in name, but with a heart as strong to do battle in her own defence as unmerited punishment is apt to make us.

CHAPTER III.

MYRA HEARS SOMETHING, PERHAPS TO HER ADVANTAGE.

AMONG the marvellous dispensations or compensations of nature there is one in the garb she puts on in different regions, less striking, but not less gratifying, than many others. The north, the south, the west, the east, have their peculiarities, more or less remarkable, at the varying seasons of the year. Even some counties, which exhibit characteristics of beauty in the summer or spring, give precedence during winter to less favoured regions. The unexciting green of the midland grazing lands, during the time that the southern corn-fields are waving their golden offerings in the face of heaven, assert their pre-eminence when the dull brown

clods of fallow absorb the passing lights and shadows that flit across them from the wintry sky. It is the privilege of few lands to be always equally beautiful, as it is of few faces to be equally bright, or few destinies to be without a flaw.

It was not a pleasant time that Myra set out for her aunt's house in the west: a raw and humid day in early March. Devonshire itself looked miserable. It accorded with her own state of mind, and reconciled her to leaving the externals of what ought to have been a happy home. She had lost none of the beauty for which she had been remarkable as a wild Irish girl, when she rode with her guardian or his guests, or helped to drag the waters, or mark the coveys, of Castle Courthope. Why should she have lost it? It was but a very few years; and sorrow like hers, if it does not kill, strengthens, but does not soften. Her beauty was not gone, it was only changed. Hers was no longer the bright, cheerful face it had been when she used to divert Madame de Horsemann with her English notions of liberty, anticipating her friendly smile by her own burst of laughter, as

she remarked upon some new feature in the household economy of Madame Montressor. She was more beautiful. Her features had become more refined and more delicate than heretofore; but with a certain character of defiance in expression, which is not at all inconsistent with loss of freshness and colour.

It is not to be wondered at that this peculiarity was pre-eminent now. Was she not going out to do battle with the world, without a friend, without a name, without a purse? Yes; and with the same courage and confidence that animated those holy men of old, who took "neither gold, nor silver, nor brass, nor scrip, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor staves." She went forth, as an honest and beautiful woman has sometimes dared to do before.

When a man's mind or a woman's heart (for I take it the one is nearly an equivalent for the other) is in a certain state, one drop, be it infinitesimally small, produces more effect than a waterspout of sympathy at another time.

Myra had borne up bravely. Her dispositions had been made, pecuniary and otherwise. She had written even a farewell letter to Lady Mary

Thorncliffe, to Mrs. Penruddock, and more last words to Mr. Weyland, impressing upon him again the secrecy which she had imposed upon him at their last meeting. She had almost done it without a tear. She was not a woman to cry for the spilt milk of society and luxury, though highly appreciative of them when she had them. Now, at the last moment, came the drop that was to run over the sides of the over-full glass.

Of her servants she had taken leave. They had been satisfied of her honesty too often to doubt her now, and consoled themselves for the loss of a good mistress by Mr. Weyland's promises of future recommendation. Dora was alone inconsolable; but Dora was an exceptional lady's-maid. When Mrs. Ferrers had reduced her own personal staff from economical motives, as may be recollected, she had selected Dora from a group of female bumpkins who sought her service. The girl was a good girl, country-bred, clean, active, handy; willing to do everything and anything; so she soon learned to dress her mistress, and, what was much easier, to love her. She had never been called anything but Dora, and if she now hoped to

better herself it was high time for her to take brevet rank.

Dora was drying her eyes, and her mistress set her a laudable example of self-restraint. "Don't cry, Dora; be a good girl. Go and see Mr. Weyland when I'm gone: you know his address. And be sure you call yourself Mrs. Browne, when you apply for a place. You dress hair much too well for Dora Browne now." Dora tried to laugh, and signally failed; but Myra tried to seem nowise disconcerted. "There, give me the shawl, Dora. No, that old one. I'll carry the other with me in case of the cold. And there's my carriage-bag, with the books, and the eau de Cologne, and the sandwiches." At that moment John announced the cab, and the fact that all the boxes were up. "Now I'm ready," said the courageous woman. "Good-bye, Dora," and Myra put out her hand; but, as Dora did not see the hand, she kissed her cheek, hot and wet as it was, and followed her man-servant down-stairs.

The sight of the cab was unpalatable. We know how indifferent to the comfort of a carriage Myra had been, when she had one, for which

she imagined herself unable to pay. Now that perversity in woman so difficult to understand came over her. The dirty cab, the reeking horse, the sulky-looking cabman, the dingy morning, affected her, and she hurried into it without looking up. They were hardly in Grosvenor Place, however, before she could see distinctly. When she could do so she saw John seated on the box by the side of the damp cabman; so she tapped at the window, and John came down.

"I didn't mean you to go with me, John."

"I'm only going to see you as far as the station, ma'am. Mr. Weyland desired me not to leave you until you had quite done with me."

"But I have quite done with you, John. I shall be able to manage for myself."

"I should take it as a favour if you'd allow me to go on the box as far as the Great Western, ma'am—I should indeed."

And then, for the first time, Myra leant back in the carriage, and gave way to a hearty flood of tears.

"John, of all men in the world! Dora, I

could understand—I half expected it; but John! Well, I'd better submit. All I can wish him is a better office than helping a pauper out of the world." And when she had arrived at this conceit, she had nearly returned to her wonted composure.

In this way Myra Ferrers took leave of her old home, and went to look for another.

Mrs. Treby did not expect the visit which was intended for her. That strong-minded lady never said anything she did not mean; and she was, therefore, fully prepared to receive her niece whenever circumstances should carry her that way. But she liked to have due notice of her visitors' intentions, and she had not yet got more than a vague notion that shortly Myra would be there.

Railways had not yet reached Mrs. Treby; or, rather, Mrs. Treby had taken care to get away from the great iron road. So she did not get her letters so early as other people, nor her newspapers on the proper day. If she had got these latter she would have been just as ignorant of Myra's business as if they had remained in the dead-letter office, for Mrs. Treby never

read any of the police reports. She sedulously went through the leaders, and at this season of the year almost spelt the parliamentary news; but she left murders, robberies, breaches of promise, and assaults, to reach her by some other means, or not at all. But she was advertised in time of her niece's arrival. That lady reached the town of Buncombe, and there finding that the day was far advanced, and that she could not get on with certainty that evening, excepting in a most unprotected manner, went through the extravagance of sleeping on the road, just as she might have done when she was a great personage, and wrote to Mrs. Treby to tell her so.

As the letter entered into no details, nor reasons for the visit, but simply told the fact of her approach, Mrs. Treby felt unmitigated pleasure at the prospect.

"This is delightful," said she, when she got the letter. "Get ready the best bedroom, Tucker" (Tucker was her female factotum); "and mind that we have some sardines, done on the gridiron, at dinner. Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers used to be very fond of them. She slept at

Buncombe, so I suppose she'll be here in an hour or two."

"And Mr. Ferrers," inquired the Abigail, "will he be here too?"

"No, my dear; I've heard nothing at all about him;" and the old lady's face was crossed with something of a shadow at the bare prospect.

In the course of the afternoon Myra did arrive; and though Mrs. Treby remarked on the alteration in her appearance, she got through her dinner and had almost reached the time for retirement before her aunt was made aware of the step her niece had seen it necessary to take. For so very old-fashioned a woman as Mrs. Treby the measure stood in need of a strong defence.

"And now, Myra, I think you must be tired. If you want to go to bed, ring the bell. You don't look quite the thing."

"I'm not quite the thing, aunt."

"Then what can I do for you, my dear? Would you like some elder-wine? It shall be done for you directly: Tucker does it beautifully."

"All the elder-wine in the world won't wash away my misfortunes, aunt."

Mrs. Treby was obviously upset, and it is not to be wondered at that her face expressed a very uncomfortable surprise. Her thoughts were on her tongue.

"And what has become of Mr. Ferrers, Myra?"

"You have not heard, then?"

"An old woman who lives in seclusion is not likely to have heard of your husband, if you know nothing of him yourself;" and Mrs. Treby looked severe.

"I have ceased to live with my husband. He was—he was—dishonest."

"He was your husband, Myra; you should recollect that; and if his wife deserts him in such a strait——"

Myra sat in an arm-chair by the side of the fire, but out of its light; her arms were crossed, and her eyes here filled with tears, for the same thought had occurred to her; but her aunt did not know the extent of the provocation.

"My husband has disgraced me, aunt, and you too. I have ceased to bear his name, and

have come to ask for shelter till I can find an honest home."

"You shall have it, if that's all. But you married him, and you must not forget it."

"I can't forget it, aunt. But I did not marry him—I married a——" She was about to say an honest man, but the word stuck in her throat; and with eyes full of tears, but cheeks on fire, she continued—"I did not marry a felon." As the word was out, she threw herself back in her arm-chair.

"Myra, my dear," said her aunt, "you forget. Mr. Ferrers has been guilty——"

"Of forgery! There, aunt, say no more about it. I have done wrong, but I have had my punishment, and now I am ready to bear the rest."

After that, Myra entered into detail. She told her aunt of the current reports; while, as she proceeded between sobs of pain and sorrow, Mrs. Treby sat with unwilling ears and half-opened mouth, wondering when such a terrible calamity had befallen respectable people before. When the whole of the disclosure had been made, and the poor girl—who had been com-

pelled, like Æneas, to repeat her tale of misery —was about to retreat to her own room, the aunt kissed her kindly.

"That's enough, my dear, for the present. Now go to bed, and we'll see what can be done to-morrow. Don't get up till you've rested." Mrs. Treby was an early riser. "We'll send for Dunning to-morrow, and consult him. Dunning knows everything. God bless you, my dear. Don't fret."

Myra took her candle, and as she was leaving the room she turned to Mrs Treby.

"Aunt, I want you to do me a favour. I'm a Gray now; promise never to call me anything but Myra; and when I must be somebody, let me be Mrs. Gray."

"My dear, if half you have told me is true, it's enough to have shattered in pieces the best names in England. Ferrers may be good enough for all ordinary purposes, but it wouldn't stand against such a fatal blow as that. He's dead and gone as far as I'm concerned, and I've no niece left but Myra Gray."

The seclusion in which Myra now found herself was sufficient for her purposes. It was

known to a few in and therefore about the village, that Mrs. Treby had a niece or relative staying with her; and as the old lady was held in the highest estimation all over the county, and even over its borders, some of her neighbours thought it their duty to call upon her. It did not interfere with Myra's comfort; for she was persistently denied to every one, and always retired to her room. When the simple ladies and gentlemen of the county heard of the suspicions cast upon the absent Gilbert Ferrers, and surmised that the Mrs. Ferrers of whom they had heard last year might be his wife, they abstained from molesting the old lady or her niece. The old rector was a solitary exception to this rule, and he called and shook his venerable old head, and squeezed Mrs. Treby's hand in both his, without saying a word. She guessed only that he knew, and meant to compassionate her involuntary association with the transaction. He mentioned nothing about it; indeed, he knew very little, as the fugitive had not been taken, and Mrs. Treby kept her own counsel as usual.

The curate was a much greater fool, and not

half such a gentleman. He had a lively reminiscence of the beauty of Mrs. Ferrers on her previous visit, and an intense curiosity to see how she looked under her present affliction. He had some romantic idea, which he would like to have satisfied, in respect to the beauty of woman in a subdued condition. The last time he had seen Myra she was far from that.

He took very little by his motion. Mrs. Treby received him alone; when he dared to speak of the "sparks flying upwards," set upon him in a most merciless manner; questioned him about the parochial visiting he had done since Sunday, and ended by desiring him to carry a sovereign to Nelly Bantling, who had just been confined. He dared not refuse nor resent such usage. Mrs. Treby was the Lady Bountiful of the neighbourhood, and old Dr. Sandford's most intimate and cherished ally. As she said to the old rector sometimes, "You know, doctor, I should like to do good to all men, but as I can't, I shall continue to do it especially to them that are of the household of faith."

During the first two or three weeks, by slow

degrees, and broken conversations, the older lady was made to understand much of the feeling, the suffering, and the purposes of her niece.

"You cannot leave here, Myra, until all is settled about your unhappy husband," said Mrs. Treby one morning, as they sat discussing the probable future. Mrs. Treby had an old-fashioned divine on her knees, in which she seemed to have been exploring with some difficulty.

"I have nowhere to go, at this moment, aunt."

"So much the better, my dear, you'll be the more easily reconciled to being the companion of an old woman."

"For a time. But that can't last for ever, you know;" and a rather melancholy smile came over Myra's face as she said so.

"I know it. And though I should like to have you here, I think you're right."

"I'm sure I'm right. The next thing to think of is where I can go."

"There's plenty of time for that. You look very ill; and you must stay here till the summer, at all events," replied her aunt. "A

more important question, by far, is what you can do when you get there?"

"I think I can keep myself from starving, aunt."

"If it's a question only of starving, you shall not do that, Myra. You spoke of your hope of gaining a livelihood by music?"

"It seems to be the only thing. I was badly taught in Ireland, but exceedingly well taught in Germany; and at Castle Courthope I used to play the organ, almost the only exercise beyond riding on horseback and salmon fishing, I ever had."

"Why not try Ireland again, Myra?"

"You forget that my object now is to be forgotten. I could not go to Ireland without being recognised in my own county; and there's not a livelihood for me anywhere else in the country."

"Apply to Mr. Deloraine." Mrs. Treby did not see the look of embarrassment which followed this suggestion. "But perhaps, as he's so much of an absentee, he could not assist you. Still, he must have a large acquaintance; and, under the circumstances, would do anything."

"Yes, Mr. Deloraine has been, and would be

a kind friend to me; but Ireland is—is—from association distasteful to me. No; I cannot go to Ireland—least of all to Mr. Deloraine."

It is not surprising that Mrs. Treby looked upon this scheme from another point of view than Myra.

As time passed on, the warm, sunny days of an early April began to appear. Myra often sat out in the sunshine, carrying a book with her, but her thoughts far away upon the future. It was curious how seldom she reverted to the past; it was, perhaps, a mark or quality of that strength of mind, which seems to have built itself upon her weakness. Nor would it all topple over on that account, like a superstructure too heavy for its base. Just now it wanted careful balance, for this repose had brought with it a reaction, and the mind was at rest, or nearly so. A weight spins long on the point of a needle, but it won't do to let it remain stationary too long.

These little conversations with her aunt kept Myra up to the mark. To have been sent out on a maudlin walk or ride, with five-sixths of the old women (or young ones, for the matter of that) in England, would have hastened a catas-

trophe. But Mrs. Treby was a good, vigorous talker, always to the point, and, when she loved, with a vigorous helping hand and plenty of sympathy. She was another form, an older one, of Lady Mary Thorncliffe.

One morning, as she sat on the broad sunny terrace, wondering how long she should live, whether she should always be a provincial music mistress in a provincial cottage, whether her husband would be taken, and whether her aunt Treby was capable of assisting her materially in her plans, the old lady stood before her. She was, as usual, beautifully dressed, her figure and general appearance vigorous and upright, and her brow clear and unclouded, as though she had scarcely seen sixty summers. She held some letters in her hand, which had arrived by the second post, but she did not give any of them to Myra.

Standing there, and looking down upon her niece, her great-niece, it should be remembered, she said—

"You have had no intimation of the proceeds of your property, Myra, nor of the purposes to which it has been devoted?"

"Yes, I have; two or three days past I heard from Mr. Weyland. There was every prospect of the lease being sold. The furniture is already disposed of, and the pictures; but I have no account of them at present. I have desired them to be paid to Mr. Weyland, for the creditors. I feel tainted by the recollection of the luxury in which I participated. With the rest of the business, the—the—forgery——"

"My dear, it has not been proved yet; for your husband has not been taken. He may be hiding for other purposes. You have no right to jump to conclusions."

"Ah! aunt, but I do know. There were other circumstances that bring it home to me, if he never is taken." Then the tears fell thick and fast, and rising rapidly, she added, "Would God he were dead—it were better for us both!" Then she walked to the end of the terrace and returned to her aunt.

"Myra, why make yourself thus miserable? You have some things to be thankful for. You have outlived the love you once felt for him; it is a great boon now, this sad reminiscence of buried hopes. You have no family. How can

you expect me to regard you as Myra Gray if you will continue to regard yourself as Myra Ferrers? I have thought of one thing for you. You shall go from here, Myra, and—I'll be your banker." Myra protested with the tears in her eyes. "You know what I told you. I have a sufficiency while I live; for your sake, my dear, I wish it had not been entailed on my dear husband's family. However, sufficient unto the day. But here are your letters, I had almost forgotten them." With which Mrs. Treby left her.

Myra had heard three or four times from Mr. Weyland. He had enclosed letters from Lady Mary Thorncliffe, Mrs. Penruddock, Dora, and Mr. Deloraine. They each begged to do what they could for her, and had enclosed their letters to Weyland, because Myra had declined to leave any address. She had answered these letters, begging, however, that they might be the last, and asserting her wish and determination for the most profound seclusion. She declined Lady Mary's offer of the cottage; she knew that they must all understand her augmented bitterness, and would not reproach her with it.

When she saw Weyland's handwriting, she had forgotten the trial for the moment, and was thinking of her aunt's kindness and of her own necessities. She broke the seal, and from his own letter dropped a column of the *Times*. Myra read the letter first. The news as regarded the house and furniture was good. Deloraine had felt that it was not chivalrous to Myra to attempt further interference, and had returned to Ireland, led on by questions of tenant-right and the Roman Catholic claims; but it went on to say that, painful as it was, the facts of the case should be made known to her from time to time; that it was difficult to know what amount of credit should be attached to newspaper evidence; but that it was Mr. Weyland's duty to let Mrs. Ferrers see the statements which appeared, and in which all the reports agreed. The whole thing, he assured her, had been sifted of irrelevant matter, and it was difficult to see how her husband or his memory should suffer more than that of others who had been only less unfortunate. He presumed she had seen the papers.

"Memory!" said Myra aloud, and she tore

open the paper which had fallen to the ground. She had desired to see no papers, and she had seen none, not, however, calculating upon such a catastrophe as that which happened. It is not necessary to give the reader the narration of facts as they appeared in that particular form in which the newspapers had placed them: it will be enough to report them without the various conjectures, comments, and interpolations.

On the second remand, the four prisoners who stood before the magistrate on the first occasion again occupied their unenviable position as before. They were, however, now supplemented by Mathilde von Robeck, *alias* Bransome, who had been apprehended as an accessory, and in whose possession were found papers which left no doubt of the complicity of Gilbert Ferrers. It was presumed by the solicitor for the prosecution that that gentleman's capture was no longer necessary to the success of the arraignment. Nor was it. The evidence was clear beyond all question. Not only was it shown that the prisoners had been engaged, at the time of their capture, in the forgery of foreign bills of exchange, but they were shown to have negotiated

these bills to the amount of many thousands during the last twelve months, and to have divided the proceeds among themselves and their accomplices in France and Germany. The appearance of Mathilde among the prisoners created an extraordinary sensation. Her striking beauty, the wildness and caprice of her manner, the brilliant colour on her cheek, rapidly succeeded by a death-like pallor, the fashion and richness of her attire, combined to make her an object of great curiosity, and in most cases of pity; and the court was densely crowded. The evidence did not go beyond her letters and her German correspondence, copies of bills and signatures, of which but few had been discovered, and her well-authenticated connection with Ferrers. But then Ferrers was only presumed to be the man who had escaped, and the evidence against him in his absence was no more than that against Mathilde. Her silence, and that of the other prisoners, had criminated neither him nor themselves.

Mathilde von Robeck had held firmly to the front of the dock, declining the chair which had been offered her, and bearing with great self-

possession the manifest curiosity of the spectators. The police, however, had intimated to the solicitor that further remand was unnecessary; they had no more evidence to offer (and indeed it was not at all wanted), nor would it be possible to produce Gilbert Ferrers. At this stage of the proceedings a smile of much satisfaction lighted up the features of Mathilde. The coat found in the office was marked with the initials "G. F.," but there was nothing beyond that to prove ownership. The note found in it from Mathilde was without a name, though dated, addressed, and signed by herself. So far so good. What had been heard of Gilbert Ferrers, then, against whom a warrant had been issued, on the strength of intelligence conveyed to the sergeant-inspector? The court was not kept in doubt. The police who were charged with the execution of the warrant had that morning returned from Calais. They had taken him in a silver hell—in a house devoted to gambling for francs and centimes; they had carried him with them safely on board a small boat last night at eleven o'clock. The night was dark and stormy. In going off to the packet they had been nearly

upset, and the police had enough to do to look after themselves, to say nothing of their prisoner. The storm increased as they approached the packet; and just at the moment that the light had been raised and the rope thrown out to them—whether he had fallen or jumped it was impossible to say, but the prisoner disappeared beneath the waters. It was affirmed by the police that his hands were in handcuffs; that it was impossible he could have escaped; that the search on each side of the vessel was prompt and close; and that the prisoner must have been drowned.

At this moment all eyes were turned towards the dock. Insanity had before been suggested as a possible plea of defence for Mathilde. To look at her, it scarcely stood in need of medical testimony. Her eyes were half bursting from their sockets, the veins in her forehead swelled, her temples had become red, and her lips pallid to whiteness; she was scarcely able to articulate, but at length found words for one single accusation, as she looked fixedly at her fellow-prisoner, Klapp, "You—you have betrayed him!" at the same time springing with the

activity of a wild cat past the Englishman Dobson, and seizing the huge German by the throat. The efforts of the police were unavailing to remove him from the grip, by which she nearly strangled the prisoner, and it was not until she fell fainting from exertion into their arms that he could be released.

The scene added something of horror to the miserable tale which had just been told; and if a doubt was likely to be raised in behalf of the female prisoner's responsibility before, there was every reason to think now that a jury would consign her to the confinement of a madhouse rather than a prison. She was supported in a state of stupor during the few minutes more necessary for the completion of committal.

"You have no doubt, then, of the death of the unhappy man named in the warrant?"

"None, your lordship," said the constable.

"He was manacled, and might have fallen over as much by accident as design?"

"He might, my lord."

"You had lights with you on board the boat?"

"We had two, my lord; but one of 'em went

out, and the other was being held up to the packet for a rope."

"You didn't go in after him?"

"No; but we searched all Calais and the beach again, and never heard of him; and we came away by the morning boat."

"And you feel sure the unhappy man is drowned?"

"Quite sure, my lord."

"That will do. You may stand down."

After which display of judicial authority, the magistrate addressed the conscious prisoners, with the unconscious Mathilde and the semi-conscious Klapp, and committed them to take their trial at the Central Criminal Court.

When Myra had made herself master of thus much, with burning eyeballs and choking throat, she made her way to her own room, and it was some weeks before she left it.

CHAPTER IV.

MYRA PROCEEDS TO SUPPORT HERSELF.

WE are in the autumn of the year. On all sides the colouring has grown rich. Gold throws its glories over the country; every variety of brown, purple, violet, even red, decks the woodlands, and nature's covering is more beautiful in its decadence than in its early and vigorous assumption. This is eminently the case even in a country where green predominates. In the heart of a grazing country (and the part of Warwickshire of which I am about to write, and which must finish our story, is a pure grazing country), there is such a luxuriance of foliage round Burnham Abbey, as is not to be seen even in the woodlands of Surrey.

A very long, low, Elizabethan house stands

on a plateau or platform of ground. It is but two stories high; and it seems to be set, like a grey-toned picture, in a very frame of gigantic timber-trees. In the front a terraced walk extends some distance beyond the conservatories which bound it on each side. These conservatories weaken its effect as a whole; they take from that respectability, that dignity of age, much as a fashionable bonnet and too piquant chaussure detract from the peculiar charm of venerability in woman. But the owner had a hobby which overrode his taste. The terrace was not only long, but broad and noble, terminating on either side in sloping grass, which appeared to run imperceptibly into the grand luxuriance of woodland, of which I have just made mention. There had been a time when these woodlands had been treated almost as shrubberies; when well-kept walks and rides joined almost on to the very gardens themselves; but that was when the Trevors were wealthy folk, before the great rebellion. Since the Restoration they rather served for the occasional shooting parties, where rabbits crossed and pheasants fell; where the squire, on

grand occasions, allowed himself and his friends a diminished battue; in ordinary circumstances, they were covers, stocked with wild undergrowth and magnificent timber, a little too near the house to hold a fox.

Three or four steps below the terrace was one of the most beautiful flower gardens that can well be conceived. No beauty that care or knowledge could add to this oblong space was wanting. Its brilliancy of colour, its tasteful adjustment, its balance, and its variety, were worthy of the Crystal Palace, or of Enville; of houses of far greater wealth than its owner possessed. From it again descended other steps, until at a distance from the house of perhaps a hundred yards or more, a gradual slope led down to the edge of a piece of water, too modest in size to be called a lake, but losing itself notwithstanding among the drooping branches on either side, where it met the woods.

It would be difficult to describe the beauty of the scene from the house, which looked towards the west, and which now saw the sun at the close of an almost cloudless day sink gradually behind a row of purple hills in

the far-off distance. Spreading out between the terrace and the hills, nothing intercepted the view over the grass lands but occasional hedgerows, full of fine elms. The fields themselves were dotted with sheep and cattle; and here and there a neat white homestead, with its red roof, reared its head; and one line of willows showed where the brawling streamlet ran down to the Avon.

So much I have said of the exterior of one of the prettiest seats in England. Its interior was as handsome as it was convenient. A fine old porticoed doorway on the other side opened on a large hall, whose dark oak roof rose to the very summit of the house. Various doors on either side disclosed handsome rooms, and on the left hand was a broad, well-lighted stair-case. Above, running round the hall, was a gallery from which access to the bed-rooms was obtained. The reception-rooms were comfortably, not richly, furnished, save where some old relics of velvet and armorial bearings recalled the spectator to the grandeur of other days. They consisted of three rooms *en suite*, of great size and well proportioned. A fine dining-room, a

drawing-room in the centre, and beyond a billiard-room, cheerful, large, and habitable upon all occasions. All looked into the beautiful garden already described. A library, a boudoir, and other useful rooms, occupied the back part of the buildings, on which also stood the offices. The stables, alas! now sadly diminished in splendour, stood still farther back from the front.

The family of Trevor was old in the county. It had come prominently forward during the civil wars, and it had come forward on the losing side. It was blest with more courage than policy; and some of its members, having ridden side by side with Rupert at Marston Moor, and stood shoulder to shoulder with Falkland at Newberry, had forgotten, when Naseby was fought, that it was high time to change sides. Cromwell had therefore allowed his friends to spoil the Egyptians, to plunder the malignants, and a goodly heritage had got into the hands of some four or five fanatics, who would have quarrelled with one another, but for the fear of losing it all again. Burnham Abbey and its lands were divided between two

Presbyterians, an Independent, a Shaker, and a Fifth-monarchy man. The Presbyterians were allowed to hold their own heavy slices out of the manor; but the Restoration made small matter of the last three, and before Charles II.'s gratitude was quite worn threadbare, a Trevor was in Burnham Abbey again, and a Stuart and a Sedley were his guests.

But from that time the Trevors had been poor men. It was an age when men hunted, drank, diced, and were given to other expensive follies. The Court set them the example, and the Cavaliers were not slow to follow it. It was not a mark of vicious inclination more than delicate flattery or political zeal which urged the country gentlemen and the Court to a suicidal extravagance. The Trevors were young in years, and anxious to do something worthy of their restored condition; so they drank, and gambled, and acted the profligate in more ways than one. William III. found them an impoverished, and therefore harmless, enemy; and he had the good sense to leave them as he found them: persecution might have made them dangerous. It was just the race to become

so. But if their politics were strong, their religion was less so; for before George II. died Popery had gone out, and the Trevors had forgotten to drink success to the Pope in double magnums of claret, or could no more afford it.

From this family was descended the present squire, of whom it remains only to say that a kinder, honester, or more chivalric gentleman never lived, nor indeed a more eccentric. But he was beloved in his village and by his neighbours, as was his wife, a clever delicate-looking woman, who liked her position as a Lady Bountiful, and fulfilled its duties admirably.

I said Marmaduke Trevor was eccentric. He loved two things, and all persons. The two things were gardening and music. His greenhouses, hot-houses, graperies, and conservatories were marvels of science and attention; friends, neighbours, and rivals came miles to get a wrinkle, or to gratify a curiosity. With scarcely enough to keep up the old house, as it should have been done, or to exercise that hospitality which he and his wife would willingly have done, he spent his time and his

money among his tropical plants, till the Burnham Abbey bananas and palms had become the talk of the three counties. His face was an index not only of his mind, but of his occupation: it was long, pale, worn, "sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of the hours he spent in an atmosphere which resembled that of the banks of the Gambia.

He hated hunting, though he lived in the midst of it. He kept a horse, which he rode if he found it necessary to accompany a guest to covert. But he admitted that he hated it:—a long ride out, early in the morning, in search of doubtful sport, but a certain catarrh to a man who lived in a hot-house; and a still longer ride back again, if he escaped the negative pleasure of being knocked down and ridden over by a gentleman from Leamington, or a cornet ambitious of distinction from Coventry!

Perhaps he was right. There was a time when I did not think so; but, be that as it may, he was as honest and true a gentleman as ever wore shoe-leather.

But music, ah! in that, too, his soul delighted, and, as he trimmed his trees and potted his

plants, how he stopped to whistle some beautiful air of Beethoven, Mozart, Rossini, or Meyerbeer, which he recalled at the moment. Shall I record too how he kept his flute always on the hall-table, and how he picked it up upon every occasion to solace his melancholy, or to express his satisfaction? How he sat down to the piano and struck a few notes at odd times, just as your lover of a book omits no opportunity, no five minutes of the day, for his favourite occupation? To Marmaduke Trevor music was music; an instrument was a means of eliciting a pleasure at any moment. It was as good as a cigar, and could be shared with others, a virtue in Trevor's eyes. Of course Mrs. Trevor knew not a note; but all this by the way.

You see the man, as he turns out of his conservatory at the end of the terrace. He has dined, and, having put on a shooting-jacket, has paid his last visit for the night to his pet orchids. The sun is just going down, and the moon is rising. He stops a moment to look at the scene on the spot on which his ancestors have so often stood. None of them better than

this single-minded country gentleman; none with a purer or finer sense of the beautiful. And, as he stood, he was joined by a fair woman, who passed her arm through his, and looked up in his face.

"Now, what's to be done about the organist?" said the lady.

"That depends entirely upon circumstances."

"But you know the candidates, their claims and their merits."

"Not all—we have a new entry this very day. Who do you think?"

"Not my old friend Cox, of Stansfield? Ah! I should be glad."

"My dear Bessie, you'd be a great exception. He has neither ear nor knowledge, and as to instructing the choir——"

"But the seventy pounds a year would be such a thing for him."

"I'd rather give it him out of my own pocket than hear him earn it. No, Bessie, a woman. What do you think of our new neighbour at Oakshade?"

"Mrs. Gray!" said Mrs. Trevor, with a rather scared look.

"Yes, Mrs. Gray, my dear. She's intimated her wish to enter. What do you think?"

"I think you should be cautious. Do you know anything of this Mrs. Gray?"

"Nothing but that she has already half a dozen farmers' children, whom she teaches admirably. She is a musician, I know; but of course the churchwardens and I must hear her tomorrow at the church. Lady Carnaby proposes to be present. A capital judge, you know."

"But the choice rests virtually with you."

"Of course. And if she proves competent, more competent, that is, than the others?"

"According to your account that would not be difficult."

"In a village like this we can't expect much for what we can give or raise. The other difficulty is the teaching the children, and the influence that might be exercised over them in Church matters." Here Trevor lit a cigar, and was silent for a few minutes. Then he began to walk up and down, talking to himself, as was his wont.

"That's one of the reasons why I want you to be careful: she's so good-looking."

"Too good-looking to be good, old woman? That's curious logic—perhaps true."

"But I'm speaking of the influence she ought to exercise."

"Why not? Beauty does exercise an influence highly beneficial."

"You know what I mean," said Mrs. Trevor, interrupting him.

"And I hope the little boys will feel it as they ought."

"Be serious. Do you know Mrs. Gray?"

"Yes. So does everybody in Burnham. And I know no harm of her."

"Have you tried to find out? Does she give any testimonials?"

"An old lady, a Mrs. Treby—the Trebys are all Devonshire, a West of England people—declines to say more than that she knows her and vouches for her respectability."

"Is that enough? Who vouches for Mrs. Treby?"

"That's not bad, Bessie; but you women are so suspicious."

"And you men are always carried away by a pretty face."

"I was once. It's been a fatal mistake."

"Then be careful now. Poor woman! perhaps I'm wrong; but there are circumstances which—which——"

"Of course there are—such as heavy dews falling after a hot day in August, by which people take cold. Go in, Bessie, and leave me to finish my cigar."

"Then you mean to admit Mrs. Gray as one of your candidates?"

"Doubtless. And I'll tell you what you shall do, if she satisfies me of her capability to play, you shall go and call upon her. It's a hard case that the poor woman should not earn a livelihood only because she's better looking than anybody else." After a few more words of badinage of a like kind, Mrs. Trevor went indoors, and Trevor continued to pace the terrace and look at the scene until he had finished his cigar. "Women are very sharp. Perhaps Bessie is right after all. The widow is wonderfully handsome; but she looks ill, and has seen trouble. I wonder what Bessie will make out of her at last.

As Lady Carnaby did not appear at the

church on the morning of the competition for the situation of organist at Burnham, it became necessary to give her information on a subject in which she took an interest. For this purpose Marmaduke Trevor walked over to Crosby Manor. He had an idea that walking should be the ordinary mode of progression within given distances, as being more certain in its results and more dignified than bad horsemanship; and indeed he was right. Trevor's general rule of life was so sedentary, that it lightened his heart to walk briskly across his own or his neighbours' green fields, climbing the good hog-backed stiles with their crossed planks, and which were seldom negotiated on horseback. It gave him, too, an excuse for an untidiness in the way of favourite old shooting-jackets and boots, which would not have accorded so well with a smart hack as with a thick stick or the more homely spud.

Lady Carnaby was at home, and looked like what she aspired to be, the wife of the wealthiest baronet for miles round, and the handsomest woman in the county. Marmaduke and his Bessie were possibly of more real influence

in the neighbourhood, for Burnham and Crosby people were Irish in their admiration of the good old stock, and there was nothing to touch the Trevors for ancestry. Burnham Church was full of the old monuments, brasses, and tattered banners of a Trevor dynasty, whereas Sir George Carnaby was a baronet of no very early creation. His great great grandfather had been a courtier of George II., and favourably known in the '45. He spent the money in that thrifty Court which had been made by his predecessors east of Temple Bar, before it was decorated with human heads, and he was one of the aides to the Duke at Culloden. It was no discredit to the winning side to have supported the Royal Butcher; and Alston Carnaby was of the opinion of many others, that the most merciful mode in the end was to do the work effectively. But in old-fashioned country villages, with their traditional lore and local antiquities, the Crusades and Marston Moor had a great deal in hand as compared with Lombard Street and the Scotch rebellion.

But when we come to consider the magnificence of purse or person matters assumed a

different aspect. Sir George Carnaby had been in the Household Cavalry, a very distinguished member of the corps, and of society. He was by tradition the handsomest man in the British army, and his retirement from the service gave that invidious position to an ambitious soap-boiler's son. He was also one of the richest men in the British army. His popularity was never so great with the women as just before he married Lady Carnaby, and never so great with the men as immediately after that well-assorted alliance. Miss Lawson was the most beautiful woman in England, without a penny, and the daughter of a Scotch peer who was quite incapable of giving her one. She was just as amiable and amusing as she was handsome, and as well able and well pleased to administer Sir George's hopitalities in the country for nine months of the year as in London for the other three. She liked the Trevors, and was liked by them; and as their nearest neighbours of equal rank with themselves, was always ready to support the Burnham institutions, schools, church, and charities, which she was able to do, as well as her own.

"So you've walked over, Mr. Trevor, notwithstanding the heat?" His boots, jacket, and general appearance indicated as much, and he was untidy enough to have been digging or mowing the lawn before starting.

"I hate riding, Lady Carnaby. Besides, I have nothing to ride."

"What have you done with Rufus and Charlie?"

"Rufus is worn out, and Charlie is only fit to gallop in soft ground; he tumbles about in the roads like a drunken man."

"Well, I wish I could induce George to walk. He lives on horseback."

"That's why he likes it. I'm afraid of being kicked off when the hacks are fresh, and of tumbling down when they're not. When they're cheaper I shall treat myself to something good and quiet—a lady's horse."

"And when will that be?" inquired Lady Carnaby, who had a very fair notion of the expenses of such an establishment as her husband's.

"When velocipedes become common. France and America are full of them. We are tak-

ing our ideas from those countries very rapidly."

"The dramatic authors say, 'without acknowledgment.' The two countries," added the lady, "that I dislike more than any."

"Is it possible? I thought the virtues of the first were sure to find favour in the sight of your sex, whatever might be the case with ours."

"You mean their politeness, refinement, manner, or whatever it may be called. The outside of the platter, Mr. Trevor; gilt gingerbread. There can be no politeness with the selfishness of a true Frenchman. They are all flourish and flattery while there are spectators to repay them, and where the woman is young, or well dressed, or protected. They are coarse and selfish when she is not so. They smoke in your face, elbow their way in a crowd, get the best place at the *table-d'hôte*, or anywhere else."

"Come, Lady Carnaby, you never experienced this?"

"No; for these very reasons, because I never stood in need of their attentions; but I've seen it. Englishmen have ten times their courtesy."

"I suppose you'll admit that we are influenced to a certain extent by good looks?"

"I must admit it; but I don't think politeness consists in magnificent flourishes or unmeaning speeches. And now we are on the subject of pretty women, you must tell me about your Burnham schoolmistress, that I was to have heard on the organ."

"I'm sorry you did not hear her. You might have been on my side."

"What, against Bessie? Then you're no wiser than your neighbours. George saw her the other day, and says she's a miracle of nature."

"What a compliment, when nature has so much to do to hold her own against art. But, to say the truth, she plays very well; of which science Bessie knows nothing. And we might have almost decided, if—well, if—she was not so mysteriously handsome."

"What report does your wife give? Has she been to see her?"

"That she's anything in the world but a village schoolmistress. That she's evidently a well-bred person; and that, when asked about

antecedents, she referred us, by letter, that is, to whom do you think?"

"No idea at all," said Lady Carnaby, growing interested. "To one of your tenants, perhaps: Old Peastraw, or David Coulter, or your gay widow, Mrs. Wrigglesworth."

"Nothing like it, Lady Carnaby. She referred us to you."

"You're sure it wasn't to George? For I should begin to feel uncomfortable."

"No, it wasn't Sir George."

"And what did she say about me?"

"I'll tell you how it happened. Mrs. Trevor went to inspect her at home."

"Mistrusting you."

"I shouldn't have sent her to hear the organ, you know."

"True. Forgive me. Go on, Mr. Trevor."

"She told Bessie that a lady in Devonshire, whose address she gave, would answer every question, admitting simply that her condition had not always been exactly what it was now. But, adding, that that ought not to be any obstacle to her getting a respectable livelihood."

"Nor ought it, Mr. Trevor. Well, what did you do?"

"We accepted her reference, and wrote to the lady in question."

"And you have her answer?" And Lady Carnaby spoke with some impatience. "But I don't see yet what I have to do with it."

"You shall see the letter. It is the letter of a lady, and of a well-known family. But the document is worth seeing," said Trevor, laughing, and producing from his shooting-jacket pocket a short pipe, a piece of matting, a budding-knife, three or four garden wall nails, and a letter or two. Having carefully selected one, he presented it to his companion.

Lady Carnaby looked at it without recognising the handwriting on the envelope, but she had no sooner dived into its contents than she jumped up, burst into a merry laugh, and exclaimed, "As I live, my old friend, Mrs. Treby!"

Mrs. Treby's letter ran as follows:—

"DEAR MADAM,—

"I can vouch for the character and respectability of Mrs. Gray, whom you mention,

in every respect. I know nothing of her music, which I detest, nor of her teaching, which I detest still more. But I am quite sure that whatever she says she will do, she will do to the utmost of her strength and ability. I can only tell you, that if you don't like her, and can persuade her to come here and take care of an old woman, here's a home for her as long as I live.

"It has just occurred to me that you may want somebody to vouch for my character and respectability. If so, I beg to refer you to my dear Lady Carnaby and her good husband, who, by the post town, cannot be a hundred miles from you. "I beg to remain,

"Your very faithful Servant,

"ISABELLA TREBY.

"To MRS. TREVOR,
"Burnham Abbey, Silvester, W——shire."

"You know her then, Lady Carnaby?" said Trevor, after listening to her merry laugh for a few minutes longer, and returning the letter to his pocket, among the pipes, string, budding-knives, and other implements of savage life in the shires. "You know her?"

"Know her!" said the lady; "of course I do. The most charming old lady in the West of England. Do you know, if it hadn't been for that letter I was going to recommend caution; for the circumstances of the case, you see, Mr. Trevor—and, then, you men——; but here comes Sir George. He'll tell you all about Mrs. Treby." And at the same moment Sir George Carnaby, the handsomest man in her Majesty's service, entered the room.

Sir George Carnaby had ceased to be that: he had become portly, and being tall, he rode a good fifteen stone. I say "rode," because he more frequently rode than walked. The county associated the idea of a horse so much with him that nobody thought how much he weighed in any other mode.

"Ah, Duke, old fellow, you're the man I wanted to see. I want to ask you two questions;" and Sir George spoke out in a burly, red-faced sort of way. His features had retained their beauty, and had been modified from those of a swell country man by the war paint of the shires. "Will you and Mrs. Trevor dine here?"

"That's the first. Yes; with a great deal of pleasure. What's the next?"

"Tell us about the good-looking widow who has gone into your diggings."

"Certainly. That's just what Lady Carnaby and I have been talking about."

"And," said Lady Carnaby, intervening, "she's a *protegée* of Mrs. Treby."

"What! of my old Devonshire flame? Then what can be done for her? We must go and see her; eh, Dora?"

"Perhaps I can manage, George, without assistance."

"I think you'll want Trevor or me. However, if you two have settled the business, that's quite another matter. You want a governess for the children, and as it's time Jack began learning a little Latin grammar, you'd hardly be so capable of deciding as to her capability." And here Sir George treated his hearers to a good hearty laugh. There was a time when he never got beyond a simper in Dora Lawson's presence, but he was much improved.

Marmaduke Trevor thought he could examine her in Latin better than Carnaby—

"Our friend, Lady Carnaby, never got much beyond the first conjugation, I fancy. It's an easy verb, and must have given the name to the general formula." Saying which, and leaving Sir George, as well as Lady Carnaby, not quite appreciative of his pun, he took his leave.

"What's Trevor been telling you about Mrs. Gray?"

"That he's made her the organist of Burnham."

"She'll fill the church for old Steadfast" —that was the vicar. "How did he come? Ride?"

"Yes, on his hobby; and he's gone back on it: Music, music, music!"

"That's a bad hobby—a whistler;" and Sir George gave another cheerful note of congratulation to his own creation. However, it was quite comprehensible to Lady Carnaby.

"I think," said he, "if Trevor had known his own interests, he would have cultivated more hunting, less music, and fewer plants."

"It costs more money, my dear George."

"Yes, but it puts on flesh. Just look at me;" and he stared at himself in a mirror.

CHAPTER V.

MYRA TAKES A NEW HOUSE AT BURNHAM.

WHILE Myra Ferrers had been ill at her great-aunt's house, the business of the world had gone on as usual. The fact of our extreme insignificance out of the eddies of our own whirlpools ought to make us less conceited. We go to the bottom, like the stone, before the turmoil we have created; and that subsides, or amalgamates itself with a larger circle, almost as soon as it reaches the world and begins to spread.

Round Mrs. Ferrers, her immediate circle and her friends, the fate of her husband and the impending trial of his associates fixed an indelibly stamped impression. A woman may have learnt to despise the meanness and to oppose

the insults of the man she has made her husband; her affection may be entirely blunted, or as effectually erased as the mark of a blow she has endured; but no woman essentially good and honourable can divest her mind of that unhappy connection, that more than conventional chord, which only ceases to vibrate with the life of one of them. What affects his fair fame affects hers; and if protection and kindness socially uphold her, and enable her to bear her burden cheerfully in public, there is still many a silent, unobtrusive sentiment connected with the times that have been which affects her more or less.

"Thank God, he's gone, my dear!" said the old lady, sitting opposite to her on her recovery, knowing that it was a source of great consolation to herself, and thinking that it should be so to her niece. "Thank God, he's gone! And as to his complicity in the greater crime—the forgeries—nothing whatever could be proved against him. The world and the press have given that wicked woman the credit of having ruined him, and she was mad."

Myra listened to all this, and guessed

pretty accurately how much she ought to believe.

But it was certainly a great point with her to find out that the memory of Gilbert Ferrers was not laden with as much as it deserved, or more than she could bear. Conscience might have made a coward of her; but in this sense it was the reflex of conscience from which she suffered.

"Deuced odd, this disappearance of Gilbert Ferrers, just at the moment of those forgeries. I wonder whether he had anything to do with that," said young Fountaine, who had frequently enjoyed his hospitality, to Deloraine.

"He's scoundrel enough for anything," replied the other, who regarded him in no friendly light, and was mentally disposed to take up any cudgels to belabour the man who had ill-used Mrs. Ferrers.

"Yes, yes; but that's not the question," said Fountaine, who rather affected the judicial mind, having once eaten a dinner in the Temple, but immediately getting tired of such uncompromising work. "He's done worse than these other fellows, d——n him! He's ruined my old aunt who lived up in Baker Street, and who will leave

me all that she has, and a great deal more that she hasn't got. What I mean is, could they have proved anything against him if they'd taken him alive?"

"Well, no, certainly not."

"There's the woman, you know——"

"There always is a woman. She was a German, and possibly connected with the felony independently of Ferrers."

"There's the waistcoat, too, and the note."

"Oh, there's always a waistcoat and a letter. There's nothing in it. I know a fellow—deuced ugly fellow, certainly—who was tried at the Old Bailey for a theft that a woman committed; very awkward, you know; and he actually stood in the dock with one of the stolen shirts on him. The jury acquitted him. All he'd been guilty of was——"

"Then you don't think he was the man who escaped?"

"Not I; not a word of truth in it. And now he's dead and gone, so much the better for everybody," said Deloraine, who was thinking of Myra.

"Ah, well," said Fountaine, "if it's only a few

old women he's ruined, it will soon blow over. I see they fell foul of the directors in one case, where they are to receive no salary for seven years. They're all in it: only he was the sharpest, and spent the money."

"If he hadn't tumbled overboard when they caught him," said Deloraine, musingly, "he'd have had a villa at Naples for two years, and then been back in the Row. Poor devil! But it's all the better for his wife."

And so thought everybody. It was quite as well he was dead, before anything more came out. Some people thought it was quite as well so pretty a woman was out of their way. Lady Mary Thorncliffe and Mrs. Penruddock were heartily sorry for her, and all the men joined the ranks of the mourners.

And while Myra was recovering strength to go out and do battle for herself with the world, she made acquaintance with the fate of the other prisoners, and with the terrible destiny of Mathilde. The former of these had been sentenced, as they deserved, to various terms of imprisonment, with hard labour; and the latter had been removed to the wards of a county madhouse.

Myra thought that was punishment enough, and hoped to see her face no more. Percy Hardman and his companions had no defence that involved Gilbert Ferrers, and as far as he was concerned personally, they went out of the country without a sign.

Myra herself was very obstinate about her future plans. When getting strong again after her illness, and when sitting out in the warm evenings looking at the lovely moorland that extended beyond Mrs. Treby's cottage, and to the warm red sunset sinking behind the purple hills, she often thought how easy and comfortable her life might be in such an asylum. And it was offered to her by her aunt with as much honesty of generosity as was possible. "You'll be my companion, my dear. You'll be earning your daily bread better and more pleasantly than by this wild-goose chase of yours in search of a permanency." Sometimes the old lady got irritable, and said, "I do believe you're on the look-out for another husband, Myra." But Myra only laughed, and Mrs. Treby admitted that she thought nothing of the kind. Every now and then came letters to her through Mr. Weyland,

the solicitor, and inclosed to her aunt from London friends, who had known her and wished her well. Myra's popularity indeed with those who acquitted Gilbert Ferrers of heinous crimes made his perfidy look the blacker, while in some measure it protected him from the effects of very bad opinion: so few people liked to imagine Myra as the widow of too great a *vaurien.*

Mixed motives made her obstinate. She was always self-willed, as a child, as a girl, as a woman, when she ran away with such a husband; and the fact that what she wanted was out of her reach made her not the less persevering. She wanted to save money; to make it; and to pay it away in *rouleaux* to Mr. Weyland for the persons whom her husband had swindled. No one should say that she had participated in the plunder to any one sixpence beyond the inevitable and indispensable. Fortune had made her position a bad one; no one should say that she had made it worse. She thought of teaching, of music, of writing for magazines, of—yes, even of marriage. She told herself now that there was one man whom she could love, of whom she would ask a portion of

his wealth, if he were in a position to do so, to further her purpose, but whom she could never let down to her own level by marrying him. Gilbert was dead, she was free; but she could not yet feel fit to be an honest man's wife; too much of the charnel-house still clung to her, young as she was, for a bride.

While with her aunt, however, none of these things could be done. She would have made tea; carved the poultry perhaps, certainly have fed it; done much charity in the village, and been beloved by the poor; not the less for some mysterious affliction which they knew of, but dared not approach.

Ah! there it was; there the shoe pinched. Everybody knew something about her; everybody pointed at her the finger of pity, not of scorn: but it was equally unbearable. One little circumstance made her keenly alive to the necessity of going; ridiculous, simple in the extreme, and so very natural. The village apothecary had an assistant, much like village apothecaries' assistants, I suppose. He was a modest, unassuming youth, till Mrs. Gray, *alias* Ferrers, came among them. Now, a woman

with an *alias*, who is known to have a weak point, especially if a beauty, is fair game. The youthful Æsculapius sighed deeply, grew a large lovelock on the centre of his forehead, took to a short cane and patent leather boots in his country walks, and haunted Mrs. Treby's garden. He was but young, and grease became him; his face was covered with bachelor's buttons, and he pestered Myra by besetting her in her walks. She laughed at the absurdity, but it was a hint that she was notorious, and ought not to trouble the peace of the village longer.

"So you will go, Myra?"

"Indeed I must. Can't you understand that, aunt?"

"Well, I suppose I ought to see it as you do, my dear; but you shall have your way. Now, where are you going to, and what are you going to do?"

"I am going to teach, and to write, and to do what I can for myself."

"And if you don't succeed?" said the old lady.

"I'll come back to you."

"You will? Then I'll help you. You shall

go. God bless you. You're a good woman, Myra;" and then Myra thought she was getting more credit than she deserved. "Now, then, it's settled. Where to?"

"Shall it be a suburb of London or a large city?"

"Yes, my dear. If you wish everybody to know what you've had for dinner, and if you want to feel the obligation you are under for every shilling you receive for your services, go to a suburb." I do not know what experience Mrs. Treby had had, but she was a clear and observant woman. "No, my dear; go back to London."

"London! Never." Myra almost shuddered.

"Then try a country village. Stay; I know one such. Give me the *Times*. I saw an advertisement yesterday that reminded me of it: Oakshade Cottage, Burnham, Warwickshire. That might suit you, though I don't know anything about Oakshade. It's a cheap place, with a good neighbourhood, where you may live from year's end to year's end, and no one need be the wiser. If you can't get on there, come back to-morrow. You know your own plans best;

but Tucker shall go and inspect it for us to-morrow. Give me my stick, and let's have a stroll, Myra."

It was in this manner, and under these auspices and conditions, that Myra Ferrers, who now chose to change her name to Mary Gray or Mrs. Gray, became a ratepayer of the parish of Burnham. She was, like other headstrong persons, of an affectionate disposition; not fond of discussing her plans when she thought they would be likely to meet with opposition. She said little about them to her aunt. That old lady was much more communicative to her; and she took care to make such arrangements that Mrs. Gray should have all the pleasure of earning her own livelihood, without the risk of depending upon so questionable a reed.

I endeavoured to show the reader, in a previous chapter, the position which Myra occupied in her new home. She had been fortunate enough to find a few farmers' children willing to profit by her instruction: little things, for whom Myra stipulated simply for clean hands and face, and the privilege of giving them as little to do as possible. School! Yes. She

knew a great deal about teaching; as much as, but no more than, three-fourths of those excellent men and women who go forth to achieve a conquest, at a moment's notice, over the most difficult science in the world. Teaching! save the mark. Where be the great professors who know how to teach themselves? *Quis custodiet custodes!* Why, there is not one schoolmaster, schoolmistress, tutor, pedagogus, archididascalus, or assistant, out of every three hundred, who is not more naturally and practically fitted for the plough's tail.

Mrs. Gray knew as much about teaching as the rest of them; more than her predecessor, who had been badly bred up to a bad business, and only understood combing their heads and whipping their ——, poor little things! because they didn't clap their hands in time, nor halloo out six times six are thirty-six when they ought to have done so. Myra knew her business better. She only ordered them to bring clean hands and faces, and tidy frocks, and guaranteed to keep them so. It was very hard work, even that, at first; but not even naughty children could resist her; and as to the farmers and

their sons, she made an irresistible attack upon them all.

The women were not so easily won. They could not make out Mrs. Gray at all. She was sweetly pretty, and so kind and gentle with the little ones. So said Mrs. Tupgill, Mrs. Butler, Mrs. Bromfield, and Mrs. Gee; and they were the great authorities of the parish as to settings of eggs, curings of bacon, black puddings, and, above all things, of children. Mrs. Gray's predecessor was a good woman and bad schoolmistress, bred up to the business, part of which consists in eating muffins to any extent, and drinking tea with the respectable farmers, the squire's tenants' wives who patronised her.

Mrs. Gray did not do this, could not do this, though she would have done it too, to be independent. But the fact is, Mrs. Tupgill and her friends never asked her, never expected it of her. She was a widow, in deep mourning, and could not go out; so she had her way, and hurt nobody's feelings. They all felt for her; saw there was something more than a common loss; and with a rare tact, which generally belongs only to the very high and

the very low, asked no questions about the late Mr. Gray. One said he was an exciseman, another a most respectable upholsterer, and a third thought he had been something in the City. All agreed that his income perished with him; so they paid her monthly, and asked no questions.

She had no correspondence, at present, for she wished not to be known, and that riled the postman, and the postmistress, who was curiosity itself, and would willingly have taken the office at half the salary rather than not have had it at all. Mrs. Gray had no letters, therefore she could not correct any of the suggestions which hurt her feelings.

Mrs. Marmaduke Trevor was a good, kind-hearted woman, but quite the squire's lady, and something more. She liked to do her duty, and she regarded it as a duty to know everybody in the village, more or less. A village schoolmistress was easy enough to know. Mrs. Barford, Mrs. Gray's predecessor in the Oakshade Cottage, was easy enough to know; for Mrs. Trevor simply walked in and made her acquaintance. Now, from the little she had seen, was

that the way to treat Mrs. Gray? Mrs. Trevor had too much sense to think that it was; so she had to set about it in a more delicate fashion. For she had determined that it was no less a duty, though a more difficult one.

Mrs. Trevor's mother was staying with her, and was of course called into consultation. Old Lady Baldrick was a clever woman, and though she never pretended to rule the eccentricities of her son-in-law, she gave him plenty of advice through her daughter.

"Well, Bessie, what is it now? All ready for a round, I see."

"Yes, my dear mother, I've a small basket which I want to carry to old Mrs. Snowden, poor old woman!"

"Physic?" inquired Lady Baldrick, making a face.

"Green figs, mother."

"Well, that's better. Where to then?"

"I want to go and call upon Mrs. Gray, the new organist—the pretty widow."

"I know her. Bless me, that's a melancholy visit, Bessie."

"I can't help that. Duke says I must go. I

suppose it is a melancholy business. She's seen better days, they say."

"They're always so intolerably vulgar. They always carry that Clapham Road cottage *ornée* style about with 'em; and when the thing has only happened lately, you know—and she's in deep mourning."

"Don't say a word more, but come with me, mother. When there are two of us, we shan't feel the burden so much." Upon which old Lady Baldrick, in a thick pair of gardening gloves, a most disreputable bonnet, and supporting her substantial limbs with a garden spade, proceeded to accompany her daughter on her village round.

They went down the hill and turned to the left into old Mrs. Snowden's. They deposited themselves on wicker-bottomed chairs, and their green figs on a snow-white table, and received the thanks of the old lady in her white mob cap. This visit was easy enough, and pleasant to both parties. Farther on the grandson of old Tom Peascod had not been to the school on the previous Sunday. Young Tom's conduct became the subject of debate, and more regularity pro-

mised for the future. "He wor' bird keepin' durin' divine sarvice," said his grandfather, stroking his frosty poll; "but on the next Sabbath day the birds mun ha' a holiday too."

"Susan Motley's rheumatiz' was uncommon feelin', to be sure; but, dear heart alive, they new laid eggs as the squire sent down was a'most a cure; she'd hardly felt it since. And did the squire try they corks for the cramps?" The squire did try them, and as yet he hadn't derived much benefit from them. Susan was very sorry, for she knew a nobleman, "Lord Hollybrooke, when she was upper housemaid, who suffered from the cramps, until he tied they corks rounds his legs, and never slept without 'em afterwards. Leastways, my lady told her so."

"It sounds very like shutting the stable door after the steed's stolen, my dear," said old Lady Baldrick. "Corks, indeed! round his legs; I suppose the corks of the bottles he'd emptied. Come along, Bessie."

After two or three more visits, consolatory and encouraging, they turned up a beautiful lane, a short cut from the upper part of the village to

the public road, good enough for horse or foot, impassable by carriage company. On each side grew straggling honeysuckle, woodbine, and dog-roses, in their season. Luxuriant grasses burst from the banks in profusion; and straying cattle, which had descended by an ill-kept gap, browsed on its dainties. The name of the lane was Flowerdale, and at the top of it, a little way back from the road, stood Oakshade Cottage. It derived its name from the feature of its garden, a fine old oak-tree that threw its branches far over the back of the house, sheltering it from the north and north-easterly winds, and leaving it open on the other sides to the light breezes of the south and west.

Mrs. Trevor and old Lady Baldrick reached the door of the Widow Gray's cottage through a whole host of sweet scents and lovely colours, so much the more beautiful that they seemed to have grown spontaneously and without order, on either side of the neat gravel path, and which frequently makes a garden of a labourer so lovely. Mrs. Gray's predecessor had left it in all its fulness of beauty and rank luxuriance; and Mrs. Gray's gardener, a boy from the village

one day a week, had done his duty in the weeding, sweeping, and cleaning, and nothing more.

Upon the arrival of the two ladies they knocked at the door, which was half opened to receive visitors and the breeze. A good-looking girl of ten years of age responded to the summons.

"What, Jane!" said the squire's wife, "and how's your mother?" for it was Jane Tupgill.

"Very well, thank you, ma'am," said Jane, dropping one of her best curtseys.

"Will you tell Mrs. Gray who it is, Jane?"

"Certainly, ma'am;" and away she went, leaving the two ladies staring at one another and the room, while she retired by another door into the innermost apartment. Jane returned immediately, and requested the ladies to sit down. Mrs. Gray would come to them directly.

The room in which they were seated might be an ante-room to anything, though it had always been considered the chief room in the cottage, and decorated with that abundance of muslin blind, cheap upholstery, curtains and chimney ornaments, which might be expected. At present it contained four chairs, one of which was a

sufficiently comfortable *chaise longue*, and three more, more remarkable for strength than beauty. Clean muslin curtains shut out the sun, which glinted through the branches of the oak; and there was an oak table, handsomely carved, in the middle of the room. The table was covered with books of a better class, many of them amusing and light, and others of reference, or containing matter something more than ephemeral. Of ornament there was nothing; not a Shepherd or Shepherdess, not a Prodigal Son, not an Art-Union print, not a piece of Indian china. The only thing in the room that could be called ornamental furniture, was a very pretty cottage piano. Myra had consoled herself with the idea that it was a necessary expense.

In a minute or two Myra entered. There was as little of the cottage *orneé* reminiscence about her as could well be conceived. And as she came from an inner room both ladies rose to receive her. She was taller than either, and much better looking. She was in deep mourning, which, simple in the extreme, fitted her beautifully, and showed her figure to advantage. She had discarded a widow's cap, and her

beautiful hair was admirably dressed by herself. There she stood before them, one of themselves, only considerably more favoured by nature, giving dignity to the very humble abode in which they had sought. She looked, altogether, too large for the cottage; but how or where it would have been impossible to say. Neither was there any sadness. Her eyes were bright; her mouth smiled; her lips parted, and showed the pearls between; and her cheek had a clear, light, comfortable colour, as of assured but subdued health.

As Mrs. Trevor afterwards said, "She was not the person to wipe the tops and bottoms of the chairs with her apron, and then invite her visitors to a seat."

The first salutations were awkward on Mrs. Trevor's side, as she felt the physic-basket and her mother's daisy-rake to be out of keeping with Mrs. Gray. Neither did she feel justified in beginning with, "Well, Mrs. Gray, I hope you like your new quarters." So after an attempt or two she got from the weather to the village.

"The country round is charming," said Mrs.

Gray. "But since my school is increased I hardly have time for much walking, and the days get shorter."

"I hope you like our organ. It is good for a country place like this."

"Quite good enough for me, I think. I'm very much obliged to Mr. Trevor for the trouble he took in my behalf."

"Did you play in the last place you lived at?" This was a feeler.

"No," said Mrs. Gray, curtly, who felt it to be so. "I played in Germany a great deal. In fact, music was almost my only amusement."

"Germany? You learnt in Germany? You were at school?" This was another.

"Just so. And good masters are easily got. I was always fond of it; and now I have found it very useful to me."

"You use your second room as a school-room?"

"Yes. There is less sun, and not so much chance of interruption."

Mrs. Trevor and Lady Baldwick moved uneasily on their chairs. But Mrs. Trevor, who had plenty of brains, and saw that they ought to

have had an excuse for treating Mrs. Gray as they did Susan Motley or Tom Peascod, hit upon an apologetic movement, without compromise.

As she rose, Mrs. Trevor said, "We called to ask you, Mrs. Gray, whether it would be agreeable to you to assist at the school-feast next week. We have not yet fixed the day; but we always finish the harvest with a tea-drinking and a dance for the village." This was a terrible fib: she called on a pumping expedition.

"Why not?" said Myra at once, with a good-humoured smile. "I don't think I can help you much with the dancing; but I shall be glad if I can be useful in helping you and your friends to make tea." This was said in the most natural manner possible; and as she showed the ladies down the gravel-path and through her garden-gate, she looked as if box edges and wicker gates, sanded floors and school-children, was the normal condition of well-bred women; and the Squire's lady and mother-in-law had been stepping a little above their element.

The impression left behind on either side was striking.

"Those two women meant to be kind; but, I

suppose, they're only accustomed here to see much of their inferiors."

"I wonder whether she'll return our visit. I hope not; or we shall be obliged to ask her to dinner."

"And if you did," added Lady Baldrick, "she'd have all the men in the room round her in no time. I wonder who she is!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE VILLAGE PUMP RETURNS NO WATER TO THE PUMPER.

OLD Ben Duckett sat outside of his door on a bright morning in September, smoking his pipe. Ben was a village oracle, and almost everybody, from the Squire downwards, in Burnham, stopped as he passed to exchange a greeting with the old man. He always had a quaint saying or a bit of news for every one; and, having been in the army, brought to bear a reminiscence of some sort upon everything.

"Nice morning, Ben," said Martin Smith, administering a thwack to his donkey as he passed. "How well the country looks."

"Like yourself, Martin," said the old man.

"Got nothin' else to do. Where be you two agoin'; up to the Squire's?"

"Yes. Squire's goin' a shootin', and sent for us to help beat and carry the lunch."

"Ah! you be goin' where there's more on you. How be the partridges?"

"Not so many on 'em as last year. They be thicker down on Tupgill's land; but that's a sandy soil. It be most clay up at the Home Farm."

"Good wheat land, my boy. But Lor'! what wi' the rabbits and the pheasants, and one thing and another, folks don't take much heed o' that."

"Why, what's the matter wi' you, Ben?" retorted Martin. "Haven't you got the right baccy from Silverton, or was the parson one too many for you last Sunday, when he talked about sodgers, and violence, and robbery?"

"There, you go along wi' you." And Ben turned, partly in earnest and partly in joke, away from him. "Go along wi' your donkey. You know a deal more o' sich folk than you do about sodgerin'. It's the only bit o' parchment you're fit to follow or beat." Upon which Martin Smith

and his donkey, fearful of being late, or getting the worst of the battle, moved on up the hill.

"Ay, but it's a nice day for the sport, after all. I mind when I was at Corfu, in the year—let me see—it was just after Maida, our fellows was so disappointed——"

"Halloo, Ben, here's a day!" said the cheery voice of old Tupgill, the Squire's tenant. "Fine weather for the children, surelie."

"Well, that don't consarn such as you and me, Master Tupgill."

"Don't it? Well, I think it do. I got some grandchildren, Ben, and so have you; and I hope you mean to go up an' see 'em enjoy theirselves in the afternoon. A'most the whole village will be there."

"They be too fine folk for an old sodger." For Ben was not in a good humour by any means yet.

"Then don't come the old soldier over me, Ben. Who's too fine? Surelie the Squire ain't too fine, nor the ladies ain't too fine; and there's the—the schoolmissus——"

"She be fine enough for anything now," rejoined Ben. "She wor a simple woman enough

when she first come to the parish, and might a taught our Harry, like Mrs. Barford afore her; but you've lacquered her up, and made so much on her, you and the gentlefolks, that she can't teach nothin' but music and sichlike; and Master Harry must get his larnin' from the parish school. She's a dainty one, she is! And so she's goin' to the feast along wi' the rest o' the gentlefolks. Well, one man's twelvepence is as good as another man's shillin', and when a man means to sell apples, he oughtn't to be above cryin' 'em."

"Well, Ben, good day. You know you're as proud of our new schoolmistress as the rest of us, and you'll go up to the Abbey after dinner, if it's only to look at her pretty face." With which little bit of bucolic chaff, old Tupgill went to look after his lattermath.

And certainly at four o'clock in the afternoon of as bright and cheerful a day as can well be conceived, and for which this wretched climate is remarkable above and beyond all others, there sat Ben Duckett at the receipt of custom, with a pipe and a pot, near the entrance of the Squire's grounds, holding forth to the assembled

vassals on the beauty of Spanish women, the bravery of the "Dook," and the ingratitude of a miserable country, of which he was prouder than anything in the world but his little grandson, Harry. Presently the Squire and his friends returned from shooting.

"I'm afraid your old friend Duckett is getting on, Duke."

"He's very drunk, my dear," said Duke; "but as he's nothing in the world to do to-morrow, it doesn't much signify."

During the rest of the afternoon every arrangement for stuffing some and amusing others of the villagers had been made, and was carried out to its legitimate extent. Marmaduke Trevor, with Sir George Carnaby, had been out shooting for a short day, and were to meet the ladies on the lawn about five o'clock. Lady Carnaby made tea at one table, Mrs. Trevor at another, Miss Mactwist, the curate's sister, at a third, and Mrs. Gray presided at a fourth table; the elderly ladies looked on, as did the vicar, a most eligible widower. Here and there were bowls, cricket of a primitive kind, rounders, and a general game, not unlike follow-my-leader,

under the arms of a ring, in which Mactwist exerted himself manfully, considering the inconvenience of his dress. Tight white collar and neckcloth, with a long cloth coat down to the heels, are not much more convenient for athletics than the dress of a Bluecoat schoolboy. Poor man, he was bound to make himself useful. The young ladies had attached themselves to this game, and gave the young curate plenty of trouble; he was first under one pair of arms, then under another, while Miss Lucy Snooks pursued him most pertinaciously; at other times he was pursuing Miss Lucy. What with the running round, and pulling this skirt and that skirt in the endeavours to escape or to overtake, worldly people like Lady Baldrick and Lady Carnaby, with the Squire and myself, might be forgiven for thinking it a little bordering on the improper, or kiss-in-the-ring style of affair; but as the ladies engaged in it were all High Church, and wore crosses, and the curate's trousers were badly made beyond all severity of criticism, of course there was no harm in it.

In the midst of all this enjoyment, however, Mrs. Gray was not forgotten. The Squire

looked at her, and his wife talked to her, and the curate was evidently bent on a semi-serious flirtation.

"Such a nice creature! So very cheerful under all the circumstances," said he to his sister. "One feels it so. What a misfortune that she's not quite—eh—dear—quite a lady!"

Mactwist was the son of an eminent undertaker, who was determined to make his son a gentleman, and had sent him to St. Bees. Miss Mactwist was fair-skinned and freckled, with French grey hair and red hands, and an impenetrable mass of affectation. She was terribly afraid of a *mésalliance.*

Even on the vicar himself Mrs. Gray had made an impression; and the sage remarks of old Ben Duckett, who had begun to make love to her himself in his fashion, were not far removed from the truth. There never was such a rise in the world. There she was, beautiful as an angel, the tenant of Mrs. Barford's pretty cottage, at a rental of only four pounds per annum, in the plainest, but very best-fitting, and neatest mourning, the mistress of a neat-handed Phyllis, and yet teaching the children of

a not very refined class, who were, however, excellent paymasters, as far as their light led them. The fact is, nobody knew anything about her, and one looms very large through the black fog of a good, deep mystery.

It was late in the evening, when the children were endeavouring to carry themselves and their buns away, and when the villagers and lesser tenants were for trying how much tea, cakes, and beer they might reasonably claim as their own, when the time drew near for that cold collation, which upon these occasions did duty for dinner at the Abbey, and to which it had been thought desirable to invite Mrs. Gray, after a little struggle (for, as Mrs. Trevor said, she "didn't know how the Mactwists and the Twisters might take it"), that Lady Carnaby took an opportunity of entering into conversation with the widow.

Lady Carnaby was a woman of the world, and with no more kindness of heart than her friend, Mrs. Trevor, was less likely to make an enemy.

"Will you excuse my saying, Mrs. Gray, that I cannot help feeling a warm interest in your

welfare. We have a mutual friend in Mrs. Treby."

"Ah, then," began Mrs. Gray, with a tone of alarm, "Mrs. Treby has told you——"

"Nothing; nothing, I assure you;" and she spoke in a hurried manner, as seeing the necessity of allaying the widow's anxiety. "She has only told us the interest she feels in your welfare, and it extends itself to us. You are fond of teaching?" inquired she, after a pause.

It was impossible to say "Yes;" it was impolitic to say "No;" so Myra held her tongue, and said nothing.

"Perhaps you are less accustomed to a number than to one or two?" inquired she, fertile in resources for consolation.

"I am not accustomed to numbers," said the widow, with much truth.

"And you would willingly give them up, if you found one or two pupils a little more of your own way, of—your own habit of mind?"

"Such children as I have have no habit of mind; in fact, very little mind at all."

"But you would be able to make your employment so much less irksome, if you could join

some easy teaching with your situation as organist."

"I should; but it seems difficult to obtain."

"Mrs. Gray, I have two little girls and a little boy. I cannot send them from home;" saying which the two turned along the terrace, and sat down at the farthest end on a couple of garden chairs. Of two men who talk, the one who stands up to it has an immense advantage; of two women, the one who sits down: they don't require to be energetic. Here both sat.

"And you would be glad to meet with a governess for them?"

"'I should, indeed; but in my case it is a difficulty. Sir George is a regular backwoodsman, never at home, summer or winter, and I want a companion, Mrs. Gray."

"And are they so difficult to get?" inquired the widow.

"Can anything be more so? Why, my dear, it's as bad and as full of risk as looking for a husband."

The widow sighed, but she relieved Lady Carnaby from her embarrassment, by replying cheerfully enough—

"But you want accomplishments?"

"No, certainly, a hundred times, no. A little music; it should be learnt early, and a taste given and impression made imperceptibly, or the result is seldom satisfactory. We are always having too little music or too much in this country. Have you heard Miss Mactwist? No. Well, hers is sadly too little; and Marmaduke Trevor's, who is almost professional, is sadly too much. No; I don't want accomplishments. I want an honest, conscientious lady." Here Lady Carnaby paused, and Mrs. Gray blushed. It was impossible not to understand Lady Carnaby; but she could hardly reply as that lady desired her to do. At length, failing a response, the latter said, "Should you feel disposed to help me out of my difficulty?"

Mrs. Gray did not reply at once; but, after a pause, which she rendered as little troublesome as possible by an unembarrassed smile, she said, "I fear you would not think me very conscientious if you knew of my unfitness for the occupation I have undertaken. I never taught a child in my life until the last six months." Here she stopped.

Lady Carnaby did not look as surprised as might have been expected, nor so shocked as she ought.

"At all events, you have done your best to make up for lost time. Most people are the slaves of circumstances. And then your music?"

"Ah! that's worse still. I'm really trading upon our neighbours' ignorance. Respectable people can read and write, and might soon find out if I neglected that part of their children's education; but they don't know much about music, and I can't help feeling like an impostor there."

"Well! you've one great virtue, Mrs. Gray; you're a candid critic. Besides, you are a musician, and your salary is well and honestly earned."

"I can play the organ, and the piano, and I have a good ear and a correct taste; and, thanks to my German education, I have been exceedingly well taught. As to teaching others, I know nothing about it, Lady Carnaby; but one must do something for a livelihood——" Myra had grown warmer than usual, and got upon her feet as she spoke.

Lady Carnaby, who was a good deal older than herself, laid her hand upon her arm, and said, "Stay, Mrs. Gray, I cannot let you do yourself such injustice. If you will not help me——"

"Willingly, indeed, if I could."

"Then do come and talk to me to-morrow or the next day. It's still warm to ask you to walk across the fields; but the carriage is coming through the village and shall call for you the day after to-morrow."

"No, no! No carriage; on no account a carriage," said Myra, and a conflict of emotions and motives drove a tear or two to her eyelashes, which escaped observation in the deepening twilight; "I'll walk, I like it of all things; pray let me walk, Lady Carnaby, it does me good."

"Certainly, my dear Mrs. Gray, as you wish. I thought it might save you time and fatigue."

It may occur to the reader that Lady Carnaby could have called upon Mrs. Gray. Lady Carnaby had not forgotten such an easy solution of the difficulty, but she was by no means certain that a visit to the cottage among her

pupils would have gratified Mrs. Gray. She had not yet mastered the fact, that as Mrs. Gray had apples to sell, she did not fear to cry them.

Of course, Mrs. Gray walked over to Lady Carnaby's in a day or two, and resumed the conversation which had been broken off by the exigencies of the Squire's cold collation. The walk was pleasant enough, over fields always green; and, to a woman like Myra, fearless of cows and short-horned oxen from her youth up, well calculated for meditation, not deep, to be sure. There are obstacles to really deep thought in Warwickshire *closen*, independently of the beasts. But Myra's thoughts were just deep enough to carry her to Sir George's house without fatigue.

She knew what she was going for, and made her preparations. She did not mean to leave her village home almost as soon as she was in it. She had more reasons than one for declining to live out of it. She was safe from interference or chance recognition. The Squire and his wife were not fashionable people, and stayed at home; and the consequence was

safety to her in that respect. Security at Burnham could be predicated, said Myra to herself, with as much certainty as at Hackney, and with more pleasure.

She had her doubts about Carnaby Manor. Sir George was an erratic sort of person, and nobody knew whom he might bring down from London, Wales, Scotland, or Ireland. The Carnabies had a large acquaintance, and though Myra could listen with equanimity to such names as Thorncliffe or Runnymede, she had no particular fancy to run up against them. So she decided that a permanent residence with the Carnabies was not desirable.

Moreover, she had taken her cottage in Flowerdale by the year, with six months' notice on either side; and that implied eighteen months' occupation at all events. She could have underlet it, if she wished. Well, that was doubtful; and economy, which she was studying, pointed to the necessity of stopping where she was.

But, on the other hand, she had no fancy for teaching little farmers, if she could get little aristocrats for scholars. She was not

living in the days of the French Revolution, and citizens Tupgill and his neighbours were distasteful to her. She acknowledged it to herself, and did not deny it to Lady Carnaby. She did her duty very honestly by them, and remarkably hard work she found it.

Our readers can easily divine how utterly unfit Myra was for the employment she had chosen. But, as she observed, what was an honest woman to do. "To have lived in luxury is a gain; to have done so on other people's money is a still greater——. No, no," said Myra, "that won't do at all. To have lived on unmerited luxury must be paid for; and now I'm paying for it." If it had only been the teaching, the stifling in a hot room with the little farmeresses, who left out their "h's" with great pains, and would talk old Saxon or Celtic, however Myra endeavoured to inspire a love for Norman French or modern English, she would not have cared. But the *petits soins* which their noses demanded, and which her predecessors had always administered, quite bewildered her. She made up her mind to act honestly by them, at all events. She would, therefore, decline

Lady Carnaby's offer at present; but if she could reconcile her present duties with the prospect of becoming only a daily governess to her, she would as certainly make arrangements for doing so.

She told Lady Carnaby as much of her intentions as she thought necessary. That lady urged her for her own convenience to throw over her present employers, at the shortest notice; which she declined to do. But she extorted from her a promise, that as soon as she felt herself at liberty to do so, she would spend a certain number of hours of each day at the Manor House.

To obviate difficulties in bad weather, Lady Carnaby proposed that she should have the carriage sent backwards and forwards. She submitted to it as a necessity.

Mrs. Gray, as we are now calling her, had but little correspondence; but she was not entirely without it. She sought as little publicity as could be; but both her aunt and Mr. Weyland kept her occasionally *au courant* to what was going on in her own world. The former sent her useful presents, and besides an allowance,

which she insisted on her accepting, she desired to know the minutest particulars as to her progress and prospects. Mr. Weyland wrote chiefly on business. The house, or rather the lease, had been sold; furniture, pictures, jewels, everything that Myra called her own, had been thrown into the fund for the liquidation of her husband's debts.

And as the autumn wore on, and winter came with its white robe of chastity and its sparkling gems, Myra grew more secure. She had already made arrangements for closing her school. She had made some money, which she had put by for her Quixotic endeavour to relieve the want which Gilbert Ferrers' dishonesty had brought about. She could not understand Weyland, and listened to him only as her lawyer; she believed she saw that he was professionally honest, which meant with her socially the reverse.

She had that sort of heart, too, which forbade her to make herself quite comfortable. Had a large fortune fallen to her lot on the morrow, she would have lived only so far as became her, under the condition of continuing to do something for the ruined women and men who were

always rising up in judgment against her. She was in this matter truly Quixotic; in all others rational enough. She was very happy, too, while she plotted and planned in direct opposition to the advice of her lawyer. He pooh-poohed everything which appeared to her most honourable. He told her that paying her husband's debts was not only impossible, but ridiculous; that, if she could pay them, it would be useless, and impossible to collect them; that many of the speculations which he had managed were paying, or likely to pay, the shareholders; that people would walk to Calais under the sea, or go over in a train; that Queen's messengers would fly, Dædalus-like, without making a new Icarian sea; and that the directors, on one occasion, had assured the indignant shareholders that the management (the "system" they called it) had been so good that the company could well afford to sacrifice the several thousands he had embezzled in the course of some eighteen months. So even Gilbert Ferrers and his peculations had their defenders.

The winter passed as winters will pass in country villages; and the only interest that

awoke for Myra was her expectation of an easier life in the spring.

Old Ben Duckett was still to the fore. His cottage faced the east and the south, and on winter's mornings he was still to be seen enjoying his pipe and the sunshine together, whenever opportunity offered. On a bright day in February he stood before his own door, smoking some villanous compound which had come up from the Goat and Compasses. The old soldier stopped now and then to curse the tobacco, and to exchange a witticism with a passing neighbour.

But there lounged by a rather remarkable person. He was certainly not an inhabitant of the village, nor indeed did he seem by dress or manner to belong to those parts. He had a rakish, devil-may-care air about him, and carried his hands low down towards his knees, inside of his breeches-pockets. He did this, not as though to shield them from cold, but with a certain swagger, which seemed to say, "there's little or nothing about here quite so much the thing as I." When he came opposite Ben Duckett's cottage he stood still to contemplate

it, and the old soldier together. Duckett, who had had some long-ago experience in foreigners, mistook him for a Frenchman; as well he might; for he was cherishing a fawn-coloured moustache and imperial, which has grown common since that time with us among the middle and lower classes.

"Good morning," said the foreigner, however, in very good English, which relieved Ben from some hazy intention of airing his French, now long lain dormant, and never much beyond asking for what he wanted to eat.

"Good morning," replied the other, always ready for a chat. "Stranger in these parts, I take it?"

"Citizen of the world, sir," said the stranger, removing his hat, and replacing it very much on one side. "Heard of the beauty of your village, and stepped across on my way to Warwick. Fond of bees?"

This question had reference to two hives which appeared at this moment silent evidences of Duckett's taste in that line.

"No; but I like honey: besides, they reads a moral lectur' to us all." Duckett straightened

himself, and looked as much like work as he could. "Industry, patience, prudence, 'conomy, and so forth. What says Scriptur'? 'How doth the little busy bee.'"

"Just so," said the other, putting some excellent Cavendish into a well-coloured pipe, and preparing for his morning exercise. "Teaches us that labour is good for woman, and that it's their business to look after the economy of domestic life. It's theirs to make, and to save, and to scrape. That's the lesson I found out long ago, without the aid of the bees, my good man; and I've always acted upon it."

"Well, but," replied Duckett, delighted at being contradicted, "don't you know as you ought, like them, to improve each shining hour?"

"Wrong again, my dear sir; that Dr. Watts that you've run your head against was a most unscriptural writer. It's the women that are meant, not we. I take it, bees are a very miserly, covetous, sordid race; picking and stealing everywhere; not for the pleasure of spending it or eating it, but just for the pleasure of storing it away. I take a totally different

view of Scripture to that. I never do anything at all. I just take things as I find 'em. 'Sufficient unto the day,' is the real gist of all Scriptural teaching about labour. I'm sure you think so, though it goes against the grain of English morality to say so. You haven't done a day's work that you could help for these fifty years."

Ben Duckett had not been taken to task in this manner for a great many years, and his open mouth and stolid stare might have told the speaker so, if he had looked at him.

"I'll tell you what it is, young man—there's one thing you forgets about the bees;" and here Ben, for the sake of having the best of his opponent, ceased to be logical: "they be industrious, and 'conomical, and frugal, and Scriptur' says as you ought to be the same; but they kills their husbands——"

"Of course they do. Why not? When they've done with 'em, when they're tired of 'em—quite right too."

Ben burst out laughing, quite tickled with his companion's honest method of facing a difficulty.

"Then, don't you see, if it's all right, and you

takes they bees as your example through life, what ought to happen to you?"

"I see only what ought to happen to you, ought to have happened to you long ago; but the women arn't tired of me yet, nor likely to be for some time to come; and when they are, you know, *à la bonne heure*, there won't be much worth living for."

Even the old soldier was too much astounded to make any reply. He had so long had the best of it over his own garden-gate with the passengers, that he could hardly realise the fact of a beating on his own dunghill.

"But," continued the libertine, in the coolest way in the world, "this is a charming spot of yours, and I suppose everything in it up to the mark—equal to its natural beauties? Anything like a small house or cottage to be let for a few months of spring or summer?—No! What, nothing?—My wants are small: room to smoke my pipe, in my little garden—never mind about the bees; and as to society, I suppose you can't boast of much of that."

Duckett was up in arms.

"S'iety? Cheerfullest village in all England.

We got two parsons, and a Squire, and a lawyer, and a retired soldier, and Squire's servants, and a retired bricklayer, and a widow, that's the horganist——"

"That's the working bee," said the other, apparently not much interested.

"She might be the queen bee for her beauty," rejoined Ben, with a good puff at his pipe.

The stranger continued to smoke his Cavendish very equably.

"Perhaps she might suit me, and kill me afterwards."

"Mayhap you wouldn't be much missed from the hive, if she did."

"She wouldn't do it if I was, you know. Women are so selfish. But what's her name?"

"Well, she do call herself Gray—Mrs. Gray."

To a close observer the stranger's face assumed a very slight gleam of satisfaction, more as though he had received confirmation of something, than as if he had hit upon a discovery.

"And she lives in the village?"

"Close by, down Flowerdale Lane; Oakshade Cottage, they call it. It's a snug little place;

but I don't think you'll lodge there," saying which Ben grinned.

"Do you think one might make a call now?" and the man looked at himself with a comically self-satisfied air, which Ben took seriously, and replied to.

"You wouldn't find her at home, for she goes to Carnaby Manor on the fine days like this, to spend the day wi' the lady and Sir George."

"Then of course it's no use for me to call at the cottage; and now I'll wish you a good morning. There, try some of my tobacco, it's real Cavendish; and I can smell yours is real beastliness. And I say," added he jovially, as he turned away, "put in a good word for me with the queen bee. Tell her my time for killing isn't come yet."

He left old Duckett standing with a faint consciousness that he had been pumped. Sold he had been. The stranger had followed up a clue he had easily obtained in the west of England, and his suspicions were confirmed that Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers was living at Burnham under her maiden name of Gray.

CHAPTER VII.

"INTELLIGENCE OF MATHILDE."

THE incognito which Myra had professed to keep, since her husband's death, was not of that strict character that she could not have been traced by active intelligence employed in the pursuit. She had no great desire to play a game at hide-and-seek with the world; and she knew enough of that world to be sure that she would not be long out of sight before she was out of mind also. Her aunt would not betray her; but there were plenty in her aunt's service, and in her aunt's neighbourhood, who knew quite enough to have put any one on the scent. Her lawyer held his tongue about her change of name and abode, and allowed any one who did inquire for Mrs.

Ferrers to forward their letters to Mrs. Treby. After the first month he was not much troubled to exercise the virtues of secrecy. Deloraine was gone from London, possibly to try his theory on his Irish shootings, satisfied with his first rebuff. The few ladies who felt for Myra, consoled themselves by waiting for happier times.

But Myra's first object in returning to her maiden name was to break all apparent connection with her husband. She imagined that she did so conclusively by becoming Mrs. Gray. The name, not an uncommon one, would answer the purpose of as much concealment as was necessary; and the substitution of Mary for Myra took away from it its only characteristic of peculiarity. Closely pressed by one who had gained her confidence, she would possibly have admitted who she was; and would have done so with a blush, not for her present deceit, but for her former innocent hypocrisies. That she was a lady of birth and position she felt most unfeignedly, and she would willingly have gone back to be her father's orphan daughter, and the ward of an earl; but she could not quite do that.

So she repudiated all that remained to her of her married life—her name and her property, and left things to take their chance. She had a just motto, "Owe no man anything," to which she adhered; she left the latter part of it to others, "but to love one another." She hoped she might come in for her share.

Her life here in Burnham had been getting pleasanter every day. Her duties had become lighter since she had given up her pupils, and accepted the offer of Lady Carnaby. They were more in accord with her feelings, and the necessity of going backwards and forwards between the two villages was lightened by the use of a carriage when necessary.

But at present the weather was fine, as we have seen; a little frosty, but clear, bright, and dry; and, save where the early crystals had been converted into mud by the sun's power, only fit for walking. It suited Myra admirably. She began to be young again, and took the active exercise with which a London life had only interfered. Her limbs began to carry her as well as they had once done in her Irish home; and her mind was getting as pliant as her limbs.

"Care killed a cat;" but Myra's tenacity of moral life beat the nine which are popularly given to the feline race.

She had very little now to create anxiety. For hard work, or some work, to a woman like Myra, with constitutional honesty and courage, brings no care. It is the want of work that would have caused her anxiety. She was pretty well assured, too, of her capability to get her living, for she learnt something daily, as well as her pupils; and the very fact of Lady Carnaby's indifference to her capacity as a teacher, made her more determined to succeed. She had a fund of application, was quick-witted and cheerful, and conscience made a brave woman of her.

When she first came to settle at Burnham, she fretted herself much as to what people would say of her; as to the position she might have to occupy; and as to the chance of being followed, or fallen in with, by some of her acquaintance of old. Her position had been assured to her by an accident; an inseparable accident from Myra—her beauty and her grace. By the same inseparable accidents, no one cared to surmise ill of her. She was not one of our lady

novelists' yellow or scarlet-haired beauties, with the massive jaw, and demoniacal green eyes, white sharp teeth, and low foreheads, without a good feature in their faces, who scare women and ensnare men, and play the devil till they be found out; women who ought to go out in a flash of fire, leaving a smell of brimstone on their wedding-day to the disappointed suitor. She was a singularly pretty woman, who liked her own sex, and was liked by them; and who was adored by the men with an admiration as constant and as universal in a Warwickshire village as in the Row.

As to the prospect of being pursued, and caught, and exposed to vulgar gaze as the widow of the man who had done such mischief, and escaped a term at the galleys by being drowned, it had lasted her a month or two. She had got over her nervousness, and lived in a security she never knew in Belgravia. Her new life, and its activities, had opened so much to her, that she had almost forgotten that she ought to have been called "Mrs. Ferrers."

But it often happens that we are roused most unexpectedly from the security into which we

have lulled ourselves. The blow comes something after the fashion of a sudden interruption to a sound sleep. It does not prevent our relapsing after a time; but it interferes with our sleep, and staggers us at the moment of waking in a most uncomfortable manner.

Myra was about to experience one of these shocks, which might be nothing at all, or, according to her own view, might portend something short of a disaster. For, in truth, an interruption to her present career of utility would have been regarded as a disaster by her. And one of the greatest charms about Burnham and its neighbourhood was her complete estrangement from her old life, and all connection with her husband's friends or foes.

A little way back we said the weather was fine, and that Myra was in the habit of walking not unfrequently to and from Sir George Carnaby's. It was the afternoon of the day of the appearance of the stranger in front of Ben Duckett's cottage, when he held forth so little to that gentleman's taste on the subject of bees, that the same individual might have been seen making an inspection of the widow's residence.

He wore the same look of good-humoured, reckless indifference. His hands were still thrust deep into his breeches-pockets, and he smoked his favourite Cavendish with peculiar gusto, having partaken of a plentiful meal of beefsteak and fried onions at the Goat and Compasses, the village hostelry which he affected. Arrived opposite to the little gate, with its flower garden, and neatly kept path, the stranger stopped a moment and meditated.

Whatever his reflections, they resulted in his lifting the latch, and walking towards the cottage door. It was now shut and locked; a precaution rendered necessary by the previous habits of its dwellers, who tempted every tramp by their tastes of indiscriminate charity, and every hawker by their love of barter. Old clothes, boots, hats, and books, forming a stock-in-trade on the one side, to be exchanged for little bits of cheap finery, or sometimes a splendid patterned shawl, on the other, which was fated to distract the congregation from their intended business in the parish church.

Finding that there was no admittance without a proper application at the door, he looked about

for a bell. There was none; and his knuckles had to act the part of knocker. He again retreated, and taking another view of the miniature cottage, muttered some imprecations derogatory to its dignity as a dwelling-house. After a second application, a woman came to the door. She was not prepossessing in appearance, but rigidly respectable, and quite the right woman in the right place.

The two looked at one another.

"Pray, might I ask if Mrs. Gray is at home?"

"No; she's not;" and Jemima was about to shut the door in his face.

"Then perhaps you'll kindly tell me where to find her?"

"How should I know where to find her. I tell you she's not at home."

"Ah! that may mean anything. I want to see her on business."

"Then you'd better call some other time."

"And when do you think she'll be home?"

"Can't say; any time, maybe, between this and dark." Here Jemima essayed to shut the door once more. At present the easy deportment of the stranger had made no impression.

"Neat little crib you've got there, and you seem to take great care of it."

Perhaps he meant to be polite; if so, Jemima was obtuse.

"It answers our purpose; and we can fill it without you," said she, tartly.

"Doubtless, my dear." This was quite thrown away on Jemima. "I only meant to remark that it wasn't quite so large as Belvoir Castle, though doubtless quite as convenient. But if you won't tell me where Mrs. Ferrers——"

"There's no such woman in the parish. Mrs. Gray lives here, and she's not at home;" saying which Mrs. Gray's Jemima, who was cook and housemaid, and ruler over nobody but a little boy who came to pump water and water pumps, as he called cleaning the shoes, shut the door.

The stranger was more fortunate in his next application. He met Tim Hodman, the bricklayer, who directed him at once the field-way to Carnaby Manor. A pipe of the Cavendish brought out Tim's local anecdotes, and before long he had confirmed all that the Goat and

Compasses, Ben Duckett, and a gossip or two more on the road, had already told him.

Mrs. Gray left Lady Carnaby about half-past four to walk home as usual.

The road was lonely enough. Nobody, man, woman, or child, in Burnham, was afraid of anything. And Myra had no thoughts of molestation, excepting from a few shaggy, long-horned north country cattle, who found her quite handsome enough to stare at; she was accustomed to it now, and found them as harmless as Farmer Tupgill's milch cows, and less playful; when she saw a man in the path, leaning against the stile by which she must cross from one seventy-acre field to another, she readily gave him credit for the bucolic virtues which belonged to the labouring population of Burnham.

But this (and she saw it as she came nearer) was no labourer. His dress was of the dirty fashionable cut which belongs especially to large towns, and the dwellers and dealers about slop-shops. There was the short jaunty pea-jacket, the baggy check-patterned trousers, the deep Parisian pockets, and the faded glories of a once well-shaped boot. The strong dis-

putant of Ben Duckett's bee theory was before her.

"If not an impertinence, madam"—and he removed his hat slightly and replaced it—"may I ask if I address Mrs. Ferrers?"

"My name is Gray, sir," said the lady; and though not feeling absolute fear, for the day was still light, and the village was at hand, Myra felt that her colour came and went suspiciously. "Who," thought she, "is this, that has unmasked me here?" She looked closely at the man, but failed to recognise him. How should she?

"I regret to have failed, then, for I have travelled far for the purpose of finding the—the —lady whom I just now mentioned."

In a moment it occurred to Myra, that by thus denying herself she might be doing herself or others an injustice. She had, too, recovered herself sufficiently to see that no present insult or injury was intended her.

"Is it an impertinence to ask whence?"

"None, certainly. If your interests are involved in those of Mrs. Ferrers, the wife of ——." She was struck by the word, and answered—

"I am so unfortunate as to be the widow of the person you mention. I no longer bear his name, but am willing to place myself in that position if the business concerns myself alone. Perhaps you will therèfore tell me where you come from?"

"First from Hoxton, near London. Since then from the west of England, where the little information I could pick up served to direct me here. You once knew a person called Mathilde von Robeck?"

With all Myra's coolness she could not hear the name of the woman who had injured her so deeply without emotion; the more so, as, by a strong effort of will, she had determined upon forgetting her existence. She believed her sufficiently punished by the misery of her subsequent fate. It was, therefore, not immediately that she replied, "I once knew the person you mention, but shall regret to have my interest in her recalled."

"You have cause then, madam, to think of my unfortunate sister without pity. I believe what she has suffered might move you."

"If you are her brother, sir, you must be

wonderfully ignorant of your own family matters not to know that her name is an insult to me. Be good enough to let me pass, sir."

But the stranger respectfully but firmly closed the only practicable means of exit from the field, and Myra, whose sense of indignity now surmounted all other emotions, once more desired him to be gone.

"I have no wish to prolong an interview which seems to give you pain; but if you will read the enclosed letters, on the subject of my sister's illness and her wish, you may be the means of saving a life. My knowledge of my own family is, as you say, madam, so slight, from a life passed entirely away from them, that I am unable even to tell whether the life is worth saving or not. I have sought you only at my sister's dying request, and not because she was my sister, but because she was dying." With which singular speech, the stranger placed in Myra's hands a small packet or envelope, and with one more bow, which his raffish appearance could not rob of a certain amount of natural grace, he made way for Myra, and disappeared on the path by which she had come.

The whole of the transaction, and the singular *aplomb* with which the speech and letter had been delivered, gave Myra no opportunity for declining to receive them; and though her heart beat high with anger at the indignity, she had now nothing to do but to carry her burthen to the cottage.

She sat at first looking into the fire, and thinking of her early associations with Mathilde; of the professed friendship and protection, and of the real injury she had received at her hands. Then she wondered how far had gone, and of what nature had been the intrigue which she could not doubt to have existed between this woman and Gilbert Ferrers. Could it have been, as the most favourable construction urged, for the purposes of fraud alone, or, as her own suspicions naturally pointed, to an equally guilty and far more treacherous alliance, for her own dishonour.

For it must be understood that, as in other connections of the same kind, too close an insight into it had not existed. Myra's was a nature not open to confidences from others on the subject of her husband. She had

not formed close friendships, she had not encouraged gossiping revelations; and what she had conjectured had arisen from what she had seen, and from her knowledge of her husband's indifference, and the unhappiness of her married life. A certain natural jealousy, too, which is never overcome in women, even by their contempt or dislike, strengthened her suspicions.

But they had never been confirmed by what is called positive evidence; nor had Myra ever taken steps for confirming them.

All these things came into her mind as she sat looking into the fire on that February afternoon. She did not open the letter; she seemed indeed for the moment to have forgotten it, as she placed it mechanically on the little mantelpiece without even looking at the direction. "She was cruel to me; for she knew the man, and his schemes, and how little of love he had for me, when he tempted me. How I blush"—and truly something more than the fire's glow shone on her temples and cheek—"when I think of the senseless folly by which I wrecked all my hopes!" Others would have said her

fortune; but Myra was far above vain regrets for such a trifle, for she had never known what it was to starve. "Why should I trouble my head further about Gilbert Ferrers, his accomplices, or his mistresses, whichever they may be?" Yet she was at that moment urged by curiosity, or some more powerful motive, to know more of him and of his end. Was he really guilty of that last fraud? Could she doubt it, even though the world chose to ignore it! Was she then the widow of a felon? And again hot blood poured itself into her face, her neck, her temples, and made every extremity to tingle. And was he positively dead? Could she doubt that? Well! she never had doubted it till that moment; and then a very curious and childish fear unaccountably took possession of her.

She sat for some time longer looking into the fire, until it was quite dark; then got up, shook herself, walked once or twice round her room, which was about twelve feet square, and rang the bell for candles and tea. Jemima, the watch-dog, lit the one (indeed it was two, for this extravagance was an instinct), and made the other. After which, once more alone, Myra

took from the mantelpiece the letter, and tore the envelope. It was directed to Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers, without an address.

The letter, which dropped on the ground, was written in a clear gentlemanly hand, and was manifestly intended for somebody else. It contained only these words:—

"If the patient now in No. 4 Ward, known as Mathilde, should not rally before to-morrow night, there can be no possibility of her final recovery. There is no harm in complying with her request to see the lady of whom she has been speaking; indeed, if anything could restore her to health and to reason, it would be probably the gratification of her wish in this respect: the return of her malady depending upon an undefined craving for some pardon of a past injustice, real or supposed.

"GEORGE STEPHENS, M.D.,
"Med. Director of C. L. A.
"Hoxton Convalescent Lunatic Asylum,
"February 10, 18—."

The note in which this had been enclosed,

and out of which it had fallen, was as follows:—

"MADAM,

"A letter forwarded to your former address has been returned; but the anxious wish of a patient to see you, and whose fate appears to rest nearly in your hands, as to her reason and her life, makes me hope that I shall be more successful in discovering you; the more so as the brother of Mdlle. Mathilde, the patient in question, has undertaken the charge of delivering it.

"Your obedient servant,

"HARRIET COLLINS,

"Matron, C. L. A., Hoxton, &c.

"To MRS. GILBERT FERRERS."

"Why should I see her? what is her reason or her life to me?" This was the first question Myra asked herself. "Her reason has been employed in fraud and chicanery; her life has been devoted to—to—supplanting an innocent woman, whom she called her friend. Why should I go? She

has my forgiveness, and my forgetfulness, which is easy. I will write."

And Myra did write that night; but a nobler, more generous feeling arose within her, and she tore up her letter. It amounted, however, only to a respite. She would wait. It was now the middle of February, and perhaps she was again reasonable and in health; in which case—— but she still said to herself, "I will wait." And she waited one day.

But the day she did wait was a portentous day: a day big with fate to Myra.

"You will come back in the carriage," wrote Lady Carnaby, "and stay to dinner and sleep here; there is only one gentleman coming, and you know the simplicity of our country toilettes on such occasions." It was just the very thing that Myra did know, and like. She had done the little dinners with her patroness before, and it brought her back happily to the glimpses of the world she was so proud of having left.

"Sir George and his friend will be late for dinner, Mrs. Gray, if they don't come home soon. They must have drawn away from home, or found an afternoon fox. However, we may as

well go;" and she rung for their flat candlesticks.

Myra lingered a moment behind Lady Carnaby to look at a picture which hung in the hall they were crossing. The door opened, but so close was her attention, that she heard nothing. A tall shadow of one standing behind her, also looking at the same engraving, first made her aware of his presence. It must be Sir George; and she turned hastily round; but the figure, in a splashed scarlet and boots as muddy as only the Pytchley country can make them, was a more graceful figure than that of Sir George. They held their lights up, and then simultaneously spoke—

"Mrs. Ferrers—Myra!"

"Mr. Deloraine!"

In one moment Myra saw her way. She must now either admit to Lady Carnaby who she was, which was a very disagreeable admission, or she must take Deloraine into her confidence; in the latter there was nothing disagreeable at all. At all events, she respected him and trusted him, and was not far from acknowledging to herself that she might have loved him. He had always

treated her with that considerate kindness which is as flattering as, and in her case far more delicate than, love itself.

"How glad I am to see you—to have found you again, Mrs. Ferrers; and here, too, with my old friend, Carnaby!" and he was just running on into a string of puzzling questions as to how she got here, where she had been, why she had not written, when he was stopped by Myra herself.

"Mr. Deloraine, I know I may ask you to—to keep my secret. I am not Mrs. Ferrers; I am Mrs. Gray. You will not doubt that I have honest and good reasons for the change."

"Not if all the world doubted them, Myra—Mrs.—Mrs. Gray. But you are staying here, and we shall meet again."

"Yes; another time will do for our confidences."

"If you have any to make to me; but believe me they are not necessary;" saying which, he shook hands with her kindly, and went up-stairs two steps at a time.

"You are an old acquaintance, then, Deloraine, of Mrs. Gray?" said Sir George, when the

ladies had retired, and when Myra had to give a like account of herself in the drawing-room. "I never heard you speak of her before."

"The acquaintance is an old one, not of sufficient importance to be mentioned." He knew Myra would tell the truth, so he had no difficulty. "I knew her in Ireland when she was young. She was brought up in Ireland."

"Ay, so she said," replied Sir George.

"And I've seen her in London. Latterly, I've lost sight of her." The cool manner in which Deloraine spoke disarmed Sir George Carnaby; and as to any tenderer feeling than that of the most casual acquaintance, the thing never entered his head. It was not a head that had room for much, and just now it was very full of the run they had had, and the corners were filled up with '44.

"Have another bottle, Deloraine? No! Are you quite sure?" said he, with the look of a man who wishes you to say yes. "Well, then, we'll go into the drawing-room for coffee."

Sir George fell asleep—he couldn't help it—and then woke up and apologised to his guests and his wife, and then did it again. Deloraine

divided his attention between Lady Carnaby and Myra; but he could not help remarking upon her improved appearance and equable tone of spirits, as contrasted with the somewhat forced and involuntary gaiety of her London life. She was beautifully dressed, too, in black silk and lace, without ornament, but without an approach to the severity of widowhood, a style she had always observed. As she leant her beautiful head on the back of her chair, posed like a woman of the highest fashion, with her white, well-shaped hands and small feet, she was a puzzle to Lady Carnaby, as she had been to many of her guests.

A little knock came to Lady Carnaby's dressing-room door when the men had exchanged their dress coats for smoking jackets, and Myra walked into the room. She did not sit down, nor appear now in any light but that of Lady Carnaby's governess.

"My dear Mrs. Gray, come in. This is the time when we ought to smoke our cheroots, if you ever did anything so naughty. But come in and have a chat. It is so charming to have some one here that you know: an old friend!

and such a friend: so charming and so good-looking! Now, I'm sure you'll stay a few days with us. Send over to-morrow for what you want."

"Your usual kindness. You can do me a greater than to keep me here: to spare me for the day, as I want to go to town."

"Certainly; you shall have the brougham. Shall you return at night?"

"Oh, yes; I hope so."

"Then come back here. Your friend, Mr. Deloraine, is going to stay for some days."

"Impossible to-morrow; but if you will let me have the carriage early, I shall be so much obliged to you, and I need not say good-bye to Mr. Deloraine."

CHAPTER VIII.

MYRA IS TEMPTED SORELY TO CHANGE HER NAME.

AT twelve o'clock on the following day the matron of the Hoxton Convalescent Lunatic Asylum was roused from her nap by a little girl, who acted as her waiting-maid. She was a very stout, straight-featured woman, with a good, stern determination of purpose about her eyes, but a kindly expression of mouth, a face rather persuasive, after the Cork fashion—"No compulsion, only you must." Harriet Collins had the character of being thoroughly trustworthy, and in emergencies a woman of undoubted courage, as she was of strength. In person she was scrupulously neat, and remarkable for the taste displayed in her

caps, which were brought to bear with great effect upon the unruly. It is said that upon one occasion, when a convalescent maniac had a sudden return of his disorder, the unexpected appearance of Mrs. Collins on the men's side of the house, in a full evening cap, so paralysed him, that the patient fell down at her knees as something supernatural, and was taken unresistingly by the warders.

Be that as it may, Harriet Collins was a worthy woman, and only cried, "Odd rabbit it!" when little Sally announced a lady with a "horder" to speak to the missus. Of course the lady was Myra, and the "horder" in question was her own note, with that of Doctor Stephens.

It seems that Myra's change of purpose was sudden — sudden enough for anything; and not being, like poor Mathilde, bereft of her senses, she could give a reason for it, if she would have done so: well, that is, if she had brains or courage to analyse her own feelings. Had Deloraine's visit anything to do with it? Yes; honestly it had. From the moment she had come within the mysterious circle of Delo-

raine's influence, she was anxious to clear up all that rested in doubt about Gilbert Ferrers and his fate. Who so likely to know anything as Mathilde—always providing she was in her senses? What so powerful to influence that wandering brain as Myra herself!—she whose image was supposed to be filling it with pictures which were to soothe, like the soft green of nature, rather than to excite, like the vigorous colouring of art. It was well that she had not written to deny all sympathy, all care, all knowledge of Mathilde, but had reprieved the stricken felon, even for her own purpose. Myra might have had higher motives, but such as they were (and like all on earth they were mixed and many) they brought her to inquire for Matron Harriet Collins, of the C. L. A. at Hoxton.

"Alive, ma'm? yes; and with lucid intervals. We thought she was quite cured. She was acquitted, you know—nothing proved against her but some German letters, and what they call undue influence used against her. Ah, well, in my young days the influence used to be the other way." Mrs. Collins was only forty-five, and this honourable capitulation before a young

and pretty woman speaks volumes for her sense and truth.

"And how came she here, this Mathilde?" inquired Myra.

"Benevolent people, as heard she'd led a wicked life, thought she'd be a good subject for the non-restraint system. She got better, but wasn't considered quite right; and they sent her here. She was almost cured, when there comes a friend to see her, and he set her raving again."

"And what sort of a person was he?"

"Well, he was an uncommon handsome man, with a short black beard and moustache. But one of our warders said he was a'most sure he was one of the gang."

"And she recognised him?" inquired Myra, whose own face had undergone a change.

"Oh, yes; she knew him. Then, after he was gone, she began ravin' about Mrs. Ferrers; and when she got into a low way, and was dying, Doctor Stephens thought her only chance was seeing Mrs. Ferrers."

"Well, I'm come for Mrs. Ferrers. Perhaps that will do as well."

"Hardly, ma'am. She's got something on her mind. And now she's quiet."

"She's quiet, is she?" By which Myra seemed reassured. "Am I to see her alone?"

"Well, what you says to her won't be heard, nor you won't be seen. There's a screen, and we're always within call. But, poor thing, she's quiet enough."

They walked on through clean, cheerful apartments, looking out on a garden and green fields. There were two or three beds, with iron bedsteads, and near the fire three or four women were occupied in work of various kinds. With each was an attendant; and Mrs. Collins chatted cheerfully to everybody, as did Myra, upon occasion, passing through the rooms. As they came to No. 4 Ward, Mrs. Collins told Myra that Mathilde was alone, and might be sleeping. They entered on tip-toe.

There she lay. What a wreck of her former self! Her beautiful hair now cut close, but growing in luxuriant boy's curls over her head. Her eyes sunk in their sockets; her clear, soft cheeks of an unearthly paleness; her full, handsome lips, no longer red, were parched and dry;

and the teeth, which she showed closely shut, were no longer white and glistening. Her hands, on the coverlet of the bed, were attenuated, and every vein stood out from the peeling flesh. But even in this state there was a certain beauty, as of untimely decay.

Mrs. Collins made a sign for Myra to advance, while she placed herself behind a screen, close to the door, where her help could be available at a moment's notice. As Myra approached the bed a thousand bitter thoughts rushed into her mind, and tears, of which she was never lavish, sprang to her eyes. At the same moment Mathilde von Robeck, if she were asleep, awoke.

At first she seemed dazed, and looked at the tall, dark figure before her without sensible emotion. Presently she said a few words, and then sat up in her bed, and looked fixedly at Myra. After some hesitation she began again, in a very low, husky tone of voice, "Myra," as though doubting whether it was she or only her wraith. "Myra," she repeated; "Mrs. Ferrers. It is Gilbert's wife!" and then she held up both hands in a supplicating attitude. "She is come—to—to forgive me!" Her eyes, now large

and wide open, looked glassy and dry, as if tears might have been a relief to her; but they did not come. Myra was somewhat overcome, and feared to look at her. She, however, felt that something was to be said or done, and replied to her implied question—

"How far is my forgiveness necessary?" But she stood still at the foot of the bed looking down, while Mathilde sat up with her hands clasped.

"How far!" she spoke dreamily, and very faintly. "For everything — treachery, malice! You loved him so much that I soon ceased to like you. I loved you at first, till he came between us."

"But he never loved me."

"No. Yet I thought he must. But he was too fond of money to love anything. He pretended to love me even then. You know he was mine first, before you took him away." There seemed a strange drowsiness, almost indifference, now to the whole business, which Myra might have guessed to be the near approach of death; but she did not.

"I don't understand you." And then she

looked up sharply, and was shocked at the wretched, emaciated figure before her. Mathilde looked an old woman. The neglected wife had fared better than the cherished mistress. "Took Gilbert Ferrers away! Were you married to him?" But the question, of such vital importance to Myra, had no intelligible meaning apparently to Mathilde, who began to speak inarticulately; and then some German words, which Myra could not catch, dropped listlessly from her. Her eyes closed too, and she leant back upon her pillow; then roused herself again—

"But, Myra, you have forgiven me. Oh, how wrong I was. How could I trust him!"

And here Myra came up to the head of the bed, and took her hand, as with a firm voice she said—

"I have forgotten him, and forgiven you, as I hope to be forgiven. Now, tell me, Mathilde, were you his wife or were you only his——" But she could not finish the sentence. A horrible dread was upon her, and she called for help; for she felt the hard, bony fingers of Mathilde close upon her with a powerful grip, while she fell back on the pillow with a short gurgling

sound and strong convulsion. Mrs. Collins was there in a moment; but it was not without an effort that she disengaged the grasp of the dying woman from the hand of Myra, whose white face and compressed lips told of the terror that had seized upon her, and of her violent effort to repress an unbecoming exhibition of it. Myra Gray was not given to hysterics; but it was a terrible finish to her errand of mercy, and a fearful censure to her curiosity.

Myra sat down in her cottage a few days after this, and thought over her late enterprise and its results. She was quite capable of doing so now; for the events of her life had made her collected and deliberate beyond her years. She had lost the impulsive character of her youth, without having lost its elasticity. She knew that, and felt it, as women do, by the alternations of sorrow and gladness; and Myra was comparatively happy or sad almost alternate days. Settled, dogged, senseless perseverance in anything or in any course is a bad sign. Myra had none of that yet, thank heaven.

When she turned over her visit to Mathilde, and her recognition by Deloraine, she found

plenty to occupy her. Was the man who had visited Mathilde her own husband, returned from death to life? Why should he be? A woman like Mathilde must have had plenty of companions, bearded or otherwise. Witness this brother, who had found her out. She had been prevented from ascertaining this. It might have been her next question. Again, and it was an important point at this present juncture, was she really Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers, or had Mathilde a right to that name? It might make a vast difference hereafter to her, if he were alive. But fate had frustrated her design to find out her claim to the title. Her intense contempt for Gilbert Ferrers, and hatred of his name, made her regard the two positions with equal abhorrence; the more so as no family remained to inherit the disgrace. She had once thought it sad to be a widow. She would have given much now to be the widow of an honest man. She was just in that sort of difficulty in which women break down. She wanted to decide for herself, and was unable to do so. The thing she had not was a friend. She could depend upon Deloraine. Had it been money, or law, or her husband himself, she

could have gone to him; but now he was just the last man to resolve her doubts. She would trust Lady Carnaby: she would tell her all, who she was, who she had been, what were her resources, what her hopes. No; not exactly that: for she had hopes, and some reason for them, which it behoved her to keep to herself. She had got as far as that when a visitor was announced, and Deloraine entered the room.

His greeting was warm and sincere. "Lady Carnaby was anxious to know how Mrs. Gray——"

"Call me Myra, Mr. Deloraine."

"So I will, with your permission; but Lady Carnaby said Mrs. Gray."

"I'm much better, and shall walk over to-morrow."

"And she begs that you will finish the visit you terminated so abruptly."

"And which has been the cause of my non-appearance to-day."

"You do too much. Why will you not let your friends take some of your unpleasant labours off your hands?"

"I know some who have tried, Mr. Deloraine;

and I am not the less thankful that I have not been able to accept them."

Deloraine knew what she meant. He had endeavoured by means of Weyland, Myra's lawyer, to offer pecuniary assistance to her when in her supposed difficulties. He was vexed that she had not accepted them, but was willing to admit to himself that there were good reasons for her refusal.

"But now, Myra, why not let others interfere in your behalf?"

Then he slowly led her on to talk of old times and old friends; of Lady Honoria; and Lady Catherine, who was going to be married; of the friends they had known together in London and in Ireland. He drew her back to a cheerful world that she knew well, and of which she might have been reasonably fond; but of which, as she now told him, she had taken leave.

"Early, very early in life, is it not, Mr. Deloraine? But I'm very happy here. Your friend, Lady Carnaby, is very kind to me; if she knew all, she could not be more so, and might be less so: yet I mean to tell her all."

Myra was talking as cheerfully as if the matter were of small importance.

"She and Sir George have been talking about you ever since you left them. She is a good woman; in fact, a lady; which word does not seem to be used in the same definite sense as gentleman is with us. She told me all about your life here."

"And you told her——"

"Nothing. What had I to tell after your request? Nor need you tell it yourself, if you prefer to keep your secret."

"With her it seems less honest. With the world it is a matter for my own consideration. Mine is an *alias* that hurts nobody, and protects myself."

"You may some time exchange it for another, which may give you no difficulty."

At first, Myra did not catch Deloraine's meaning. She looked up at him; nor was there much to be gleaned from his face, until the colour mounted gradually into his cheeks and forehead, and his eyes glistened with a consciousness. Myra was about to answer, but looked down; and scarcely knowing what to answer, said faintly—

"The day must be far off."

"I don't see that, Myra;" and he seemed to make good use of the permission now he had it. "Are there not hundreds of men of honourable position who would be glad to associate their names with yours, and to take you into their families as their most treasured possession. You have been the child of circumstances; painful to yourself to the last degree, but not discreditable. There's not a speck of tarnish on the name of Ferrers, as borne by you, that would dim the brightest lustre of the most honourable name."

The tears were in Myra's eyes now, but she managed to answer with tolerable firmness—

"Stay, Mr. Deloraine. Your personal kindness to me, and your old friendship for my guardian and his family, make you take too favourable a view of my situation, and an unnecessarily charitable one of honest men. Few would be willing to connect themselves with——"

She had got thus far when Deloraine interposed, and taking Myra's hand in his own, he said—

"I have known you, Myra, since you were a child; with one exception, by which you have been the sufferer, you can scarcely have committed an action which you would desire to recall. I know every circumstance of your marriage, of your honourable resistance to wrong, of your struggles to do right, of your present abnegation of your rights. I will give you a name, Myra, that you need not blush to bear, and will bless you for taking it."

So little had Myra Ferrers been prepared for this outbreak, for this generous proposal, whatever her feelings towards Deloraine or her hopes of a future might have been, that she remained silent; while, with one hand holding hers, he drew her gently towards him with the other. Then she attempted to speak, but was quite unable to do so; and the tears, which she had well restrained, would be restrained no longer.

"You have had a hard time, Myra; and you began your sorrows at an age when others think of nothing but happiness. Finish them now, here, at this very moment; and let me promise you nothing but happiness from henceforth."

The picture he drew was too much for her; too like the one she had once or twice thought might have been within her reach, but for one sad blunder; and she turned and hid her face in his bosom, and wept unrestrainedly.

"You don't know all. Why should I link an honest name with one of——"

"I do know all; I know all, even that you suspect, which is more than the world believes; but if I knew ten times as much, I would not allow it to stand between the love I have felt and feel."

"But let me tell you——"

"You shall tell me nothing; nothing that should come between you and me."

"But listen—pray listen!" and Myra sat up, and drew herself away from Henry Deloraine, for the same dark foreboding, which she had so constantly shaken off, had again recurred, as to Gilbert Ferrers' fate. "Tell me, is he—is he dead?"

It was now Deloraine's turn to sit up, and he did so, looking straight at Myra, and asking, in a hollow voice—

"Dead! Isn't he drowned, Myra?"

"They said so." Myra affected no sham delicacy on the subject.

"Why should you doubt it? The policemen gave evidence to that effect."

"I was ill after our troubles in London, and I heard few of the particulars. They were kept from me from motives of kindness."

"Nobody doubts it; the evidence was clear enough;" and here Deloraine recapitulated what he already knew, as delicately as he could. "Have you any reason, Myra?"

"No good reason"—she found it impossible to talk to him now about Mathilde; "but we women always have odd fancies, when our happiness depends upon them."

"You mean, have a talent for making yourselves miserable; but you must not do that. You see now, Myra, that a friend might have been of service to you before this; and now—will you employ me?" She put her hand into his for an answer, and he took it up and pressed it to his lips. "I'll clear up your doubts, Myra, next week. In the meantime, what answer am I to give to Lady Carnaby?"

"Say that I will come and finish my visit to-morrow."

Henry Deloraine trod upon air. He had no more doubts of his final success than of his safe arrival at the Manor House. Why should he have had? That it was a triumph, not over difficulties, but over circumstances, added to his happiness. Five or six years ago he had thought of the handsome girl, when scarcely out of the schoolroom, as his wife. Lord Fitzcourt-hope's death gave him a stronger claim than ever, and a better chance; but he neither pressed his claim at the proper time, nor made anything like the most of his chance. And now it had come to pass, after her wretched marriage, and at a time when her husband ought to have been alive and enjoying himself, if the favourites of the gods are alone taken early, that he was about attaining his object. Surely Gilbert Ferrers was rascal enough to have troubled this world any number of years; and bad enough not to have been missed out of it when he died. When Deloraine got thus far, his thoughts took a disagreeable turn towards Myra's uncer-tainties, and the remembrance of his promise to

go in search of information, which information, if affirmative, he hoped not to find.

He strode on manfully through the fields, not much troubled by the obstacle set before him; and wondering whether, or how far, he ought to trust his friend Carnaby with his secret. Men are not so much given to that sort of confidence as women; and that's the reason why women are never so trustworthy of a secret as men. They really do not see the value of reticence in the same way. We call it a defect of character, though it doubtless has its beauties as much as any physical or moral difference from ourselves, which among us goes under the same name. He came to the conclusion of his walk and his deliberation about the same time. He need say nothing to his host or his hostess. His nature, with all its manliness and straightforward courage, had a touch of the woman in it, and he once began to think that he might say a few words about Myra to Lady Carnaby; but he decided, as he mounted the last stile, to say nothing to anybody; at all events, till his London journey was over, and his footing, as Myra's accepted lover, was firm beyond all question.

Myra was attacked by a host of strange emotions. With all her difficulties, all the dangers that had been crowded into her married life, with her youth, her beauty, her ignorance, unprotected, her love of truth outraged, her affection trampled upon, never had been a truer wife. She had never indulged a hope or thought derogatory to the most unbounded claims of her husband. She had not made his neglect, his cruelty, or his disgrace an excuse for indifference to her own obligations. But there had come moments when the contrast between the kindness and delicacy of Deloraine and the coldness and neglect of Gilbert Ferrers had made an impression on her. It was not likely that a comparison, too, between the characters of the two men should have been without its weight. But beyond that, it would be wrong to say that Deloraine's former attentions had made upon her the slightest impression. Since her husband's death, she had thought of the happiness which might have been in store for her; perhaps, at times, of the possibility of its fulfilment at some distant period; but she had acted with a delicacy and self-restraint that

would have left her enemies, if she had one, no handle for cavil or criticism. Myra had left the world in which he lived; had refused the help of which she stood so much in need; had sheltered herself, so to speak, from his very presence, under a name that he was not likely to identify as hers, even if he had a chance of hearing it. No act of her life had called the man she could have loved to her side, and now accident had brought him positively to her feet.

And now she asked herself, since he was gone, whom should she trust. Well, there was but one, the very person she had determined to make her *confidante;* and now what a tale there was to add to her previous communication! Still it was not all her own. Hitherto it mattered to no one but herself what she told. She was her own mistress so far; and Lady Carnaby might share her secret—might know that she was the wife of a swindler, the widow of a felon. And she knew very well that the knowledge would not have made her the less kind, the less generous, the less sympathetic. But if she meant to be the wife of Deloraine, that secret was no longer her own. In him it

would make no more difference than in the other, of that she was well assured. But it was no longer her property, her inner life; and every circumstance connected with it was to be shared with another; and without his permission, she would not seek the sympathy of Lady Carnaby's support.

It must be added that she felt now less in need of it. If hitherto she had done without the solace of friends, if she had supported her own trial, and nursed her own sorrows to rest, certainly she was better able to bear them under the support of such prospects as those which were opening before her. The help she had prayed for, and struggled for, was coming from the happiest quarter. Among all the clouds that sorrow led her, or through them, the light was breaking, and the clear blue sky was showing itself in the quarter where it was most likely to expand into an endless, a cloudless sunshine. Thus Myra thought, thus she believed; and ever and anon there came upon the horizon that little cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, which might spread and bring storm and tempest back again. But while she bid such

thoughts perish, she braced herself to the occasion. She had suffered, and she knew how to bear disappointment—where to look for strength; and if she was denied an honest and an honourable love, she could take shelter in a friendship that she knew would never fail her. Friendship! sceptics laugh, and tell you that it will not live between opposite sexes; that it merges into something more or less tender. That men and women cannot promote the good and happiness of one another save in one way. I tell you that in time of trouble man looks for his best friend in woman, and woman for her firmest supporter in man. Happy, indeed, when that junction is formed in an honest and abiding love.

So they both kept their own counsel, while each thought the other had turned king's evidence.

The dinner at the Manor House assisted accidentally to put both Myra and Deloraine at their ease. It was not strictly a family party, as it included Marmaduke Trevor and his wife, the Dean of U——, and a neighbouring rector. The conversation took so general a turn, that personal questions could have no part in the enter-

tainment. Of course, the rector thought it right to say something professional to Mr. Dean, who replied in the same tone, and then asked an irrelevant question of Trevor about his orchids and damp heat. Mrs. Gray was greeted by Mrs. Trevor with more surprise than cordiality. She saw only the organist of Burnham, and the daily governess of Lady Carnaby; and it was a weakness so common, that it may be excused in a good woman unaccustomed to surprises. During the visit Myra had no difficulty in speaking to her late guardian as Mr. Deloraine; it was more troublesome to him to call her Mrs. Gray.

A magnum of claret is a great opener of the mouth, whatever it may be of the heart; and when the ladies had left the room the clerical element was no longer like a cat upon hot bricks, picking and choosing with much subtlety and delicacy where it should alight.

"You are going to town for the season, Lady Carnaby?" says the dean.

"Not till late. I love the May blossoms, and the bright spring and early summer in the country," replies the lady.

"The nightingales beat the opera," says the rector mildly. It was not quite a religious sentiment, but nearly so.

"I don't know about that, Mr. Yorick," replies the lady. "Sir George will agree with you."

"And Mr. Deloraine?" blandly inquires the dean's wife.

"Certainly not," says that gentleman; "though a twelvemonth of nightingales, and of May blossoms and violets, might be an *embarras de richesses* difficult to appreciate."

Mrs. Gray was not inclined to talk; though when the rector, who sat next to her on one side, said something about the schools in his parish, she ought to have felt more at home than she did. Her answer was vague: and she blushed and smiled to herself at the remarkable propriety of the turn given to the conversation, wondering whether he knew her, for she had never met him before. She was soon reassured.

"You don't feel much interest in schools and teaching, perhaps?"

"Not so much as I ought to do," said she, looking at Lady Carnaby, with a shy sort of expression.

Deloraine also heard the question and answer, and laughed.

Lady Carnaby bowed to the dean's wife, and the general movement recalled Mrs. Yorick to her senses. She was indulging in a diatribe against turnpike gates; and Sir George had just time to assure her that "he never went through them." Mrs. Gray made a point of going out of the dining-room last, with a mock humility, which must have put Mrs. Trevor quite at her ease; unless she was again unsettled by Marmaduke, whose unqualified admiration of the widow, notwithstanding her dependent position, grew with his growth, and gave itself vent in words.

"What sort of sport?" said the dean, after a round or two of claret.

"Moderate, Mr. Dean," said Sir George. "We lost him, let's see, Deloraine,—we——"

"I'll tell you where you went wrong," said Mr. Yorick, a fine specimen of the old school; "at the bottom of my meadows. I heard the horn; and ran out of my study just as your fox came up the hedge-row by the side of my garden."

"But how do you know that was the hunted fox? There were two on foot, and when we came out of the spinney below there was a long check. We hit upon him again down to the right, going for Boggington."

"I think I know a hunted fox, Sir George, from a fresh one. He was more than half beat, and lay down twice in the hedge-row. You went away with a fresh fox!" replied the jolly old rector, by no means inclined to give up his position.

"And why didn't ye halloo, my dear Yorick?"

"So I did. And I sent for my servant to help me; but there was such a blowing of horns, by master and man, that no wonder you never heard me."

"You're right. When I'm master of a pack of hounds——"

"You'll find you're everybody's slave," said the rector, who had not lived in the shires all his life for nothing, nor with his eyes shut.

"I'll only have one horn in the field; and, if I'm master, I'll blow it myself. Pass the claret, Deloraine. The dean has not tasted that '44."

Deloraine was half asleep; in other words, was not thinking of the fox. So Sir George added, by way of waking him, "By-the-by, Deloraine, I've a mount for you on Thursday, in the very best country we have, on King Charming. It's the best mount in the county for a man like you. He has a delicate mouth, and a resolute will; but if you'll trust to him you'll be in front all day. It's our best country too."

"I'm afraid I must wait to have my neck broken for another week."

"Why, what's the matter? Can't you go?"

"I must go to town to-morrow."

"Nonsense—impossible! Mr. Dean, another glass of claret. Yorick—sherry?"

"No more, thank you." And they went to the ladies.

"Here's Deloraine says he must go to town, my dear."

"Nonsense," said Lady Carnaby. "When?"

"To-morrow morning, early. He won't stay to ride King Charming."

"Nonsense, ridiculous. It's just like Myra. They're like buckets in a well."

Whether Lady Carnaby had any design upon

these two, which was likely to be frustrated, it is difficult to say. She certainly spoke like it. But to us, who are behind the scenes, her anxiety was superfluous.

CHAPTER IX.

DELORAINE LEAVES BURNHAM FOR LONDON.

DELORAINE and Myra, by a strange coincidence, as some persons would have said, were down first to breakfast. As every writer, with more truth than originality, has descanted on the charms of an English woman in a morning dress, the glossiness of her hair, the freshness of her muslins, the neatness of her feet, and the general soap and wateriness of her whole appearance, we need not waste valuable time in describing Myra. Although she was a very pretty woman, and owed little of her beauty to dress, she looked best at night, in plenty of lace, and an open, if not low cut body. Deloraine was in scarlet, as she first saw him, without the honourable

adjuncts of Warwickshire or Northamptonshire mud.

"I'm glad you are going out to-day; and sorry you refused Sir George's mount for Thursday," said Myra.

"I can go up by the night train; but if there are any doubts to be set at rest, the sooner it is done the better. You know I am as selfish as you in this matter."

"I am glad that you're going, but feel that I am depriving you of a day's enjoyment for what may be, probably is, a phantom. In one respect I shall long for your reappearance: that I may tell Lady Carnaby my secret. At present I feel almost guilty. Do you never feel what a painful thing it is to have something to conceal?"

"Not in the way you mean. But why not tell her now? If it pleases you, Myra, I can but be a gainer by it." And Deloraine regarded her with a look which exhibited his satisfaction at the prospects before him.

"No! not yet. Suppose, by any chance——" And here Myra stopped short, and was relieved by the opening of the door. Sir George came down ready for his breakfast, and asked Mrs.

Gray to pour out the tea for them, as Lady Carnaby was late. "You see I've persuaded my friend, Deloraine, to give up the point for one day; but, as he insists on going by the evening train, the compliment is rather to my mount than to our company. You try and persuade him, Mrs. Gray, that Friday will answer his purpose as well."

Mrs. Gray was in a dilemma. She certainly would have asked him, and would have been glad of his acquiescence, but for the unlucky speech she had made about her secret. Still she could not well help asking him, and she did so. "If my persuasion is of avail I shall be glad indeed that Mr. Deloraine should stay out my visit; for I must return to Burnham on Friday." And though she only spoke at him, she looked at him too.

"Friday will not answer my purpose to do what ought to be done on Thursday," said Deloraine: so he adhered to his original determination, being fully persuaded that Myra was not in earnest.

"The hacks are come round, Sir George," said the butler, at the moment that Lady Carnaby

sailed into the room (she was the sort of handsome, jovial woman, full of roses and smiles, that always does sail into a room, with a pleasant but rather loud voice) with a child in each hand.

"Not gone yet. There, George, I told you I should be in time."

"So you are, my dear, to see us start. Mrs. Gray has given us our breakfast."

"Mrs. Gray's a paragon; and I don't know what we shall do when she goes again. You'll have to go a little faster to cover. Well, Mr. Deloraine, I'm glad to see you've changed your mind. You and Mrs. Gray seem to be by nature antipathetic."

"I believe I'm entirely to blame. But you might as well think that I and — and — my lawyer" (it always is one's lawyer) "are by nature sympathetic."

"If it's your lawyer I acquit you, and pity you. George always wants to have his hair cut when he's tired of us; and our friend, Lord Cornchester, makes Miss Moucher his excuse half a dozen club dinners out of the season. But I think we're so agreeable that I acquit you; and

I'm sure you'll return before the end of the week."

Then the hacks were ordered up to the door, and the ladies and the children went to see the gentlemen start. Deloraine took an apparently formal leave of Myra, for his servant was to meet him at the Rugby station, with his clothes; but she felt that he was going on an expedition on which her happiness at least depended; and her eyes had a charm for him which he fully understood and appreciated.

Five minutes later they were cantering along the grass of the avenue under the old elms; and as they passed out of sight through the first lodge Deloraine hung back and turned in his saddle. Myra was still on the door-steps, but Lady Carnaby had gone in with the children. There was the least flutter of a handkerchief, unperceived by any one but Deloraine; and he went away with a happy presage of success.

But success in this case was a negative virtue. So long as he found out nothing which could jeopardise his chance of happiness, he might be said to be successful. It seemed almost as if he had better have stopped at home: if any-

thing at all was to come out of his inquiries it could be but mischief.

The death of Gilbert Ferrers scarcely wanted confirmation. The circumstances were as clear as could be. It was not Deloraine's business to turn him out alive; to unkennel him from his lair, if so far-fetched a notion had really any truth in it. Somebody else might have been employed on such an errand. At least, so it would have seemed good in the world. But Deloraine saw that his best chance of immediate success with Myra was to show, beyond all question, that her husband was dead; and, although most persons would have been glad enough to have taken it for granted, he knew Myra too well to believe that she would easily be satisfied. The very fact of its conveying to her so much, made her the less disposed to believe in its certainty. However, he was gone on his mission; and he was a man to execute it as honestly as might be, not without regard to his own interests.

Nor must he be judged hastily in this respect. Was he to dive and delve into holes and corners to resuscitate a corpse, which had done nothing

but wickedness while alive, to deprive two people of every prospect of happiness? If he had run into the arms of Gilbert Ferrers in the middle of the street, or if the police even had given him such undeniable information of his security and whereabouts, as to leave no doubt of his identity, Deloraine would not have shirked the question. Fashionable as bigamy has been represented to be by our present race of novelists, and even normal as the condition of society, a connection like that of Myra and Deloraine might have existed, yet he would not have risked the later discovery on her account. But if no evidence of his vitality remained, if every circumstantial proof of his death could be arrived at, if probability in its strongest form remained on his side, he was prepared to take advantage of it; and who could blame him? Now let us see what steps he adopted for securing his own interests, and certainly those of Myra.

The first person he sought was Weyland; and he easily found him at his office in Westminster. The old lawyer was as well brushed and as generally well got-up as usual. His

iron-grey hair stood up in bristles, and his white neckcloth and elaborate collars, with square-cut whiskers of what is known as the cutlet school, gave him an appearance of sharp-set respectability, which accorded with his character: a man who would not needlessly have done a dirty action, who could have done a generous one, and who, at all events, would have taken care never to have been found out. Notwithstanding, he was better than nine-tenths of his profession, which says a great deal for him, or very little for the profession.

"And so," said Weyland, continuing the conversation with a business-like air, almost as if he were examining an unwilling witness; "and so you wish to know what became of Mrs. Ferrers' husband?"

"I do; and for reasons which concern Mrs. Ferrers very closely." He knew he was assailing the lawyer in a vulnerable point: for Weyland, though he took care not to look susceptible, was so: much on the principle of never being found out, I suppose.

"And what should have become of him, my good sir?" And here Weyland pushed up his

gold-rimmed glasses upon his forehead, and looked at Deloraine. A dealer of my acquaintance, a tolerably honest man, was always most dangerous when he put his glasses upon his nose.

"That I came here for you to tell me. In a word, is Gilbert Ferrers still alive?"

"Have you any reason for supposing that he is not dead?"

"None whatever. But I should like to be assured of the fact. How can I get the best information on the subject?"

"I'll tell you what I know of the circumstances, though they've been made public to a certain extent. When the police got into the house of those German scoundrels who had been forging foreign bills, one man made his escape. By some means or other a waistcoat was found, and a note or letter with it, which implicated Ferrers and a German woman, with whom he was—well!—on intimate terms. By the representations of the police, who considered themselves done, a warrant was granted, and he was taken in Calais. They brought him away in an open boat at night to a vessel lying off the coast, and, according to their account,

he jumped into the sea while it was blowing a gale off shore. It was pitch dark, and though every possible search was made for him, he has never been heard of since. Calais was watched, every precaution was taken, the French police were put on their mettle, and nothing has been heard of him since. Where could he have gone?" And Weyland held out his hands, as if he had just finished an address to the jury.

"To the bottom, I imagine," said Deloraine. "And what transpired at the trial?"

"There seemed to be no proof that he was an accomplice in the forgery, at all, though the public were willing to believe anything in the world. What more likely," said the discerning shareholders, "than that a man who had robbed them should be willing to commit any crime?"

"I think the shareholders were not undiscerning," said Deloraine again.

"The law thought differently; and censured the magistrates and the police, who, having missed their prey, thought themselves bound to inculpate somebody."

"Is it your opinion?"

"That's nothing to the purpose. An opinion on that point is worth money; but I don't think you ought to pay for it. And I'm sure Mrs. Ferrers wouldn't ask me."

"But you think he's dead?"

"Will you tell me why you want to know?"

"No. If I say that it is to clear up Mrs. Ferrers' doubts, isn't that enough?"

"But as you haven't seen Mrs. Ferrers——"

"Perhaps I have seen Mrs. Ferrers."

"Then let her be satisfied with knowing what I've told you. If you are not satisfied yourself, you can see the police. Come here to-morrow at the same time, and I'll have them in attendance."

"I will. I believe that's the best thing I can do. And if their story is confirmatory of yours, I ought to be satisfied."

"I don't see how it can affect you; but if you have a curiosity on the subject I know no other means of gratifying it. Men who tumble into the sea in a gale of wind half a mile from the coast, and are never heard of more, may be taken for dead, unless you have some proof to the contrary."

"Would you allow Mrs. Ferrers to act as though he were dead?"

"If he had left a will, or had anything in the world to leave behind him, I think she might honestly claim to administer. But he died intestate, like other persons who have nothing to will, and you know her peculiarity on the subject of property. I believe she hardly considers the boots she walks in as her own. The best thing you can do for her, if you ever do see her, is to modify her romance, not to say her mistaken prejudices, on that question."

"*Au revoir*, then," replied Deloraine, "till to-morrow. If I ever do see Mrs. Ferrers, I'll follow your advice. I believe it's good."

"I'm not sure that it's law. Good morning." And Weyland ushered his guest through his clerks' office on to the stairs, and saw him depart.

Deloraine was pretty much where he was when he started. He knew all he had heard, or nearly all, previously; and here it was neither confirmed by Weyland's own opinion, nor the reverse. He took as favourable a view of the lawyer's character as of that of most people;

and he had no doubt he would have married Mrs. Ferrers out of hand, if he had had the chance; or anybody else either, under the circumstances. He went to his club, where he found very little solace. All the men were finishing the season somewhere; and as to the women, they were shut up at the sea-side or with the men.

I said all the men, but not quite all, were hunting. There was one of Deloraine's acquaintances in town, a hard worker on committees, who thought it well to begin vigorously. Broadbridge, M.P. for some place in Ireland, which stipulated for no principles, close attendance, and daily denunciation of the Saxon, was at his post, and came into the club just in time to button-hole Deloraine. The latter had written a letter to Myra—a letter of great encouragement, and laughing at her fears, and saying as much for Weyland's opinion as that gentleman would have said for himself, had he been in Deloraine's position. That letter-writing was not a prudent course to pursue, when it is considered that Sir George Carnaby turned out the contents of his letter-bag upon

the table at breakfast, or if too late for the ceremony, committed the operation to his butler, who laid them, naturally enough, by the plate of each guest, as nearly as could be conjectured. There was no excuse now for refusing to share the tattle of Broadbridge, and to exchange sentiments where the dearth of such things was so great. So they ordered their dinner together, and began to eat it.

They talked about women—pretty women: most men do. It is certainly a pleasant theme, and not necessarily wrong; and in talking of pretty women in a past tense, it was not unreasonable that Broadbridge should have got to Mrs. Gilbert Ferrers. She had stood high on his list of Rotten Row beauties of the season before last. It was about a year since the crash came.

"D——d scoundrel, that husband of hers," said the M.P. for Smashell.

"Did he owe you any money?" said Deloraine, prepared rather to combat the assertion.

"The French Tunnel scheme is closed, for he bolted with all the paid-up capital; a couple of 'thou' gone there. It would have bought two-

thirds of the householders of Smashell;" and tears stood in old Broadbridge's eyes.

"They're cheaper than they used to be then. And he got clean off?"

"Clean off! He's dead, man;" and here Deloraine felt that public opinion was with him; "dead as nails, man. To be sure Cashgill, who had ten thousand of the Aërial Company's shares, swears he's in hiding somewhere now, and says he'll have it out of his body; don't believe in his sinking, any more than he does in the company floating. What a body it must be, with ten thousand shares in it!"

"It doesn't sound like a light article," said Deloraine, obliged to say something. "He'd better have tried Suez Canals;" and then he went to the smoking-room.

The next morning, at the time appointed, he went to meet the police. This always has an ominous sound about it; and even to Deloraine in this instance it gave a seriousness which was unnatural and unnecessary. When he reached Westminster, he found his iron-grey monitor at the desk, reading the *Times* newspaper, and looking as cheerful as if nothing more serious on

earth existed than a Chinese rebellion or household suffrage. The bland, casual manner in which Weyland passed his hand through his bristles gave Deloraine a cold shudder; and he would smile as if he knew all about it.

"Punctual, by Jove! Well, that's ominous of something. I never knew a man with nothing to do punctual, unless he was very strongly interested in the case;" and then Mr. Weyland gave a low, inward chuckle, scarcely a laugh, rather a mental dig in the ribs, such as one only sees on the stage, and offered a seat to Deloraine.

"There; they're here, and I'll ring to have them sent to you. I'll go into the next room;" and almost as he retired, Inspector F. and his fellow appeared at the door. "Come in," said Weyland, beating a retreat, "and this gentleman will talk to you, Potter."

Potter, invoked, came in and stood before Deloraine. His great object being to put Inspector Potter and his satellite at their ease, he bid them be seated.

"Thank 'e, sir; I find I get on better standing. What with the magistrates and the duty and the

refractory ones, I'm almost always on my legs, and now I get used to it;" and Inspector Potter drew himself up, and brushed his hat with his elbow. His subordinate stood at three-quarter distance behind, and did the same.

"Certainly, if you prefer it. I won't occupy your time, which is valuable, but ask you at once what I want to know. You remember the case of Gilbert Ferrers?"

They both answered at once, so very little consideration did it require; but the policeman pulled up short, upon a refrigeratory look from the inspector.

"Of course you do; and where do you think he's gone to?"

Now this was a question which admitted of great diversity of opinion, and demanded much consideration; so Inspector Potter replied hesitatingly—

"Well, sir, it's difficult to say where them sort o' people goes to; but——"

"I didn't mean the religious aspect of the question; I mean——"

"Oh! I beg pardon, sir. Where's he gone

to? I see. Davy Jones's locker, sir, I should say." Here he answered quickly enough.

"You have your reason for thinking so?"

"Well, me and my mate very nearly went after him. The wind was blowing, and it was a'most a storm, and when he jumped out, the boat was very near upset, sir. Luckily, we had hold of the painter, or——"

"You were so near to the vessel as that! Where was he?"

"Down in the stern; and we just turned from him to get hold of the vessel and steady the boat while we got on board, and he was gone in a minute. Never see such a thing in my life. Leastways, I didn't see it, for it was pitch dark."

"And you never saw him afterwards?"

"No, sir; wasn't likely. We visited the boats, and kept a look-out for hours, and we went back to the town and communicated; but it was no use. I haven't much opinion of them foreign gens d'armes. Here and there there's a 'cute fellow enough, and the system 's good; but I don't think much of 'em as a body."

Mr. Potter was no exception to the general rule of our police: on duty they are the most

monosyllabic gentlemen in the world; they seem always afraid that they are being done out of something good, and are as shy of giving information as if they had any; but once set them talking unprofessionally, and you may have an opinion on anything, from the winner of the next year's Derby to the site of Palmyra. As Deloraine did not care to know what Inspector Potter thought of the French police, he stopped Mr. Potter with a fresh question.

"And what's your opinion about the forgery? Was he implicated?"

"Well, we lost him and we lost the proofs. There was no evidence; so we couldn't say anything about it. The woman was mad; no doubt about that; and she'd been made a cat's paw of. Some Germans took her cause up; her things were all sold, and they went to pay her expenses. Since then she's been at Hoxton, and I hear she died the other day. They say as Mrs. Ferrers went to see her, and the sight killed her. Now did she know anything about the forgery, think ye, sir? 'cos there's wheels within wheels——"

"I should imagine not," said Deloraine, rather

tickled with the notion than offended at it. "However, you say that Ferrers himself had nothing to do with it?"

"Beg pardon, sir; not exactly. There was no hevidence before the court, sir."

"Ah! I see. Then you really think that he —well, he might have—eh?"

"I'll tell you, sir. If he was to turn up again, which of course isn't likely, we've evidence enough now to give him seven years. We've seen that German as was spoony on the woman, and when he knew he'd deserted her, and she was gone mad, he split—only it was too late then."

Deloraine looked down, and thought for a minute; and then Inspector Potter said respectfully—

"If you've nothing more to ask us, sir, perhaps you can spare us now, as we're due at the Central Criminal Court at twelve o'clock."

Upon which Deloraine thanked him for his attendance, and dismissed him, adding—

"Then there seems to be no doubt of his death at all?"

The inspector looked cunningly round from the door.

"Doubt! I wish he was alive, and I'd get the skinning of him—that's all. He wouldn't die of drowning the next time."

Deloraine thanked Weyland; told him that his interview had been entirely satisfactory, and wished him a very good morning.

"And where are you off to now, my good sir, if it's not an impertinent question?"

"I've missed two good days' hunting, and I'm going to make up for it. I'm off to Warwickshire to-morrow."

"Warwickshire!" said Weyland, sticking his glasses over his eyebrows, and staring at Deloraine. His glasses were like his speech, golden, and to conceal his thoughts; now he was in earnest. "What part of Warwickshire?"

"I'm going to Sir George Carnaby's. So, good-bye, Weyland, and many thanks."

"Whew!" whistled Weyland, when he was clearly out of hearing. "Sir George Carnaby! Then he has seen Mrs. Ferrers; and no wonder he was so mighty particular about learning the fate of her late husband!" And having run his hand through his bristles, and chuckled audibly

enough to himself once more, he retreated to his inner office.

Myra was still at Sir George Carnaby's, and had received the letter from Deloraine when it was poured out on the breakfast table with the tea and the toast. She knew the hand, as who should write to her there but Deloraine? and an impatient blush spread itself over her face. Lady Carnaby had seen the letter—what woman could have avoided it! and had determined not to see the blushes—what lady could have done otherwise! But it is not too much to say that it gave her employment while Myra taught the children all about lines and spaces, and heard the eldest girl repeat Rode's air, without any variation.

But the day that Deloraine was to return, by some strange fatality, Myra insisted upon going home; nor would she promise to return the following week, excepting to give her regular lessons to her pupils. One thing may be said in her excuse: it was Saturday, and she had to attend to her Sunday duties in the organ gallery. It was a point of honour with her to let nothing interfere with an early attendance.

Myra performed her church services with a willing mind; and she was happily superstitious, if it may not be called religious, in the belief that her present relief from cares and privation had something to do with the sanctity of the occupation and its performance.

"Then you will not dine, and let me send you home afterwards? Your friend, Mr. Deloraine, will be here again this evening."

"Thanks, very much. No, I'll walk after luncheon," said the pretty widow.

"What a couple of buckets in a well," said Lady Carnaby, impatiently.

CHAPTER X.

A SURPRISE FOR KING COPHETUA AND HIS QUEEN.

FREDERIC SOULIE says, with little truth and much Gallic wit, "Un estomac de seize ans est comme un cœur du même âge, très-avide et peu difficile." We beg to differ from the clever *romancier*. The coats of the stomach and the coats on the back wear out much more rapidly than those of the heart. The latter member is seldom more vigorous than when the first has begun to fail. Both by good treatment may last a long time; but give me the heart which retains its freshness after some use, and which is never more resolute to love than after it has passed through a phase or two of that fiery ordeal; or, better still, is able to

give its virgin strength to a passion of real manhood.

This was Deloraine's case, at least. If he had felt a sentiment above common regard for the women of his own country or of ours, it had never been allowed to ripen; and, like plants stripped of their earliest bloom, was prepared to blossom with a double vigour when allowed to grow. Besides which, it must be remembered that, as a child, with a greater disparity of years, he had been accustomed to like Myra better than her neighbours; and then, when she went to Germany, his fancy was wavering, not in its attachment, but whether it was to declare itself and wait, or wait and then declare itself. He had had cause to regret the choice which had thrown her, young and impulsive, in the way of a man who had taken advantage of her inexperience to make her miserable. But now he thought, as he returned to his friends, that his doubts were set at rest; and that, at least, he might be allowed to compensate to her for her many troubles, of which he generously taxed himself as the cause.

The first thing to do was to make the Car-

nabys acquainted with his determination. In justice to his future wife, it should be done at once; and he waited for nothing but her permission. He was not long at the Manor House before he walked over to Burnham to consult Myra; or, rather, to tell her of his determination.

Strange to say, she was, if not averse to the immediate publicity of their engagement, somewhat lukewarm about its necessity. She had got to like her position of dependence in these few months better than she ever expected. This was the effect of habit. She was sufficiently alive to the generosity of Deloraine's sentiments, to the happiness and brilliancy of the prospects opening before her, and to the necessity of once more changing her lonely lot for the cheerful existence of a second and more durable sunshine than before. In the meantime, she loved the shade of her cottage; the retirement, in which she had got over her fear of the glare of the world, of publicity, of no honourable notoriety, the *digeto monstrari* (she did not say that) as the wife of a man who had half-ruined London; had brought the widow

and orphan face to face with deprivation, starvation, or the workhouse; and had perhaps done worse, though the world did not know it. A woman of Myra's susceptibility could not but feel grateful to the shelter she had enjoyed, even if irksome in some points; and the more so when about to leave it, for it was robbed of all its bitterness.

As to telling Lady Carnaby and Sir George, that was natural: how could she help it? and how could Deloraine continue their guest without this confession? She admitted that a secret was a weight; she did not like carrying it about with her; and she had had practice enough, in her husband's lifetime, to know its penalties.

Many women are match-makers; not all (or I should have been without marriageable daughters by this time); and Lady Carnaby had a taste that way. She had a sincere regard for the woman whom she first knew nine months back as the pretty widow; afterwards as the gentlest and most indefatigable governess to her children; willing in all ways, and walking in all weathers, to do an irksome duty; for Lady Carnaby knew it was irksome to her, and saw

her labouring under a very burden of incapacity. She knew her soon to be honest, industrious against her will (the most difficult thing in life), lovable, and a lady. She wanted no confidences to find out that she had not always been a village organist. So she made up her mind that the thing to do was to marry her: the only thing, in fact, to save her from herself and her perversity. To this intent she looked for a well-bred doctor, an honest lawyer, a well-to-do parson, in want of a wife. She could find none: the good ones were gone; like the wives, mothers, husbands, and fathers whose names and virtues remain upon the tombstones as so many paragons: they ought to have left much money behind them to compensate for such a terrible desertion.

Now, why had she not hit upon Deloraine? For two reasons. He was, in her estimation, not a marrying man; and, in the second place, the game was too high. When she found they had known one another in early life, too, if she had had any inclination that way, it would have effectually checked her. It was difficult to palm off even Myra as Miranda upon the man

who had known her all her life as a milk-maid.

"And now, George, it's all come round of itself"—he was in bed and half asleep, which may account for his incoherent reply—"I find natural jumpers the best; they never come to grief."

But Lady Carnaby was sincerely pleased when she heard the whole history, and made much of Myra, more, if possible, than before. She would not hear of her teaching the children any more.

"Nonsense, my dear, the thing is absurd. You can't work now, you know."

"What! not the music? I like it," remonstrated Myra.

"Not at minims, and crochets, and quavers. You may play me a bit of Mozart, if you will; but you mustn't do anything compulsory, you know."

"But I like that. Besides, you know, I'm the organist at Burnham."

"The organist at Burham—that's good. Do you mean to go there on Sunday?"

"Why not? I engaged to do so."

"And now you've engaged yourself to marry Mr. Deloraine."

"But I'm not married yet." And here Deloraine entered the room.

"Mr. Deloraine," pleaded Lady Carnaby, "Myra, you will allow me to call her Myra?"

"No one, I'm sure, has a better right."

"Thanks. Myra wants to go and play the organ on Sunday at Burnham."

"She shall do as she likes, and I'll go and hear her," said he.

"But don't you think she had better get a substitute? It's so ridiculous."

"It would be more ridiculous not to do it. I promised to give them three months' notice, and they were to give me the same," urged Myra.

"Just like an old schoolmistress," said Lady Carnaby, shrugging her shoulders.

"I was an old schoolmistress then, and was very glad to be taken for it. Let me finish my work honestly; they'll only talk if I go away and leave a substitute."

"Let them talk: the Squire's wife, and old Ben Duckett, and the rest of your Sunday

congregation. The sooner it's known the better."

"It will be known quite soon enough; let it come out by degrees. If anybody asks me, I shall not deny it. I've been very kindly treated in Burnham, and I should like to slide out of my cottage life without a splash; please, Lady Carnaby, don't press me. I jumped into the cold water, which only gave me a shock; I should like to go gradually back to the hot, or it might burn me."

Lady Carnaby and Deloraine looked half-convinced.

"You shall do as you like. I dare say you're right. So, Mrs. Gray, would you do me the favour to take the children out for a walk, and mind and see that Harriet changes their shoes and socks when they come back."

"Certainly, ma'am. And you've no objection to Mr. Deloraine going too?"

They laughed, shook hands, and separated.

Of course the report did get wind about the village and the neighbourhood, that something was going to happen to the "pretty widow," for that was the name and title by which she was

usually distinguished. It took a little time; but there was an accidental air of smartness and sprightliness which went far to corroborate old Ben Duckett's axioms. She never was a melancholy, slovenly-looking beauty at the worst of times; her plainest dress could not help having an air of coquetry about it, and if it was black, it was relieved by a bright smile, unless things were going very wrong indeed.

Ben Duckett said, "I know'd she wor too good for your clod-hoppin' chaps, as knows no more o' music than a matchlock." This was usually addressed to one of the local band, as being pleasant to hear. "There, listen to that," as the bees struck up a merry hum, "she's like a queen bee among 'e all; you ain't fit to hold a candle to her." This was usually kept for a village belle, as she came sauntering up the street on some lackadaisical errand, which old Ben thought right to censure. "And now she be goin' to be married to a great lord. Ay, Miss Spriggins, when's your little business in that line comin' off?" On which Miss Spriggins, who was the daughter of the Squire's keeper, and rather a great lady in her Sunday clothes,

tossed her head, and replied, "Great lord, indeed! I wonder what you know about great lords!"

"Well, I've fought wi' 'em, and drank wi' 'em, and heard 'em swear a many times"—Miss Spriggins was on her way up the hill;—"but I never heard 'em swear any love-vows to the likes o' you."

So it got about but slowly, and it was not recognised among the gentry, who professed to have something else to do.

Lady Carnaby had been bound to silence for the present, and it is true that she kept her own counsel for Myra's sake, who said she should leave Burnham as soon as it became a source of public congratulation.

People who have the inestimable advantage of living in a suburb of London must not be surprised at this almost criminal indifference to tittle-tattle in a country village or town; or that such a thing as a marriage between a man, whom they did not know, and a woman who occupied no higher rank than a village organist, should be scarcely worth repeating, unless by his or her friends. As a matter of gossip, such

a woman might be married and buried in a week, and beyond the parson and her own neighbours no one would be the wiser. Not so, ye would-be followers of fashion, ye of the wealthy middle-class, women of the professional element, wives of wholesale traders, bankers, and daily bread-winners. What have Mrs. Plantagenet Smith, Mrs. Montmorency Jones, or Mrs. Cavendish Robinson to do but to call on one another, and ascertain the doings of their neighbours, or make some for them if idle in that matter. They are all wealthy; their husbands are away, they have nothing to do; no poor to look after, no village dependent on them for example and vitality, no county business or charities to regulate, and no self-restraining dignity to keep up. They all talk to their servants, and tattle with the tradespeople; and they represent, as a body, a dangerous class of women, whom, for the sake of society, it would be well to employ in law, physic, book-keeping, public offices, and anything but light literature. In one week from Deloraine's return they would have known who was the widow, who was Deloraine, what was become of her

former husband, what he had had for dinner the day he poisoned himself, and with what awful anathema she had dealt her rival the death-blow in the last moments of her vicious life.

It took about two months to get thus far, and then it oozed out so slowly that it was news beyond Burnham. Lady Carnaby was for giving a formidable *déjeûner* (croquet, heaven be praised! had not reached the Burnhamites) to introduce Myra, but was persuaded still to wait a little. The Squire had not yet tendered a formal congratulation, but had smiled faintly, weakly, on some occasion when he had spoken of her successor in the organ-loft. "Was it absolutely necessary? Must she indeed go? It was a great loss—it should be kept open for her to the last moment." Which good-natured speeches were quite a part of Trevor's nature, and developed themselves with the healthiness of measles in an adult, in the case of a pretty woman.

Mrs. Trevor was not so good-natured to a woman so very handsome as Myra, and there was a little soreness because Lady Carnaby

had taken the wind out of her sails as lady patroness of the new beauty, nine months ago. Mrs. Trevor meant to have done the right thing herself, and would really have done it, but for Marmaduke's admiration, and the other obstacle, that where there is a patron there must be a client; and Myra was an unruly subject, or looked like it.

There was, however, a dinner at Burnham Abbey, which will serve to show how far behind town-life your country-bred mouse is in these things. Dr. Rudd was a fat, fair man, without a wrinkle, of the age of sixty. He had been censor of Christ Church, or something of the kind, tutor to half a dozen noblemen, a clever man, indolent, and not learned, but of excellent manners, and a toady for whose adulation nothing was too high, nothing too low. He was a most pleasant companion, and never at a loss on any subject. He is the great authority now for the rules of croquet in his neighbourhood; he was the earliest informant of the winner of the Derby at the time we speak of. He knew the name of coming plays by Lord Lytton, and the break-up of Lord Crushington, long before the

public; and if he did not know all the great people personally, at least he knew those who did. He was a jolly pluralist, without any fear of Horsman or Bright before his eyes, and an exceedingly *recherché* guest at most good tables in the county.

"So," said the doctor, rubbing his hands and taking his seat on the left of Mrs. Trevor, "you've quite a romance in Burnham, I hear?"

Mrs. Trevor did not at once catch the doctor's meaning, so repeated the word.

"Yes, my dear Mrs. Trevor. I never can have been misinformed; and if I have, it's the prettiest love-story spoilt in the world. A modern King Cophetua and the beggar-maid. Yes, the Amontillado, if you please."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Trevor, with a prolonged exclamation, "o-o-o-o-h, yes. I see. Well, we can hardly call it that, I think."

"Well, these are the elements. Your national schoolmistress, they tell me, is a woman of extraordinary beauty. My curate"—here an inoffensive gentleman of tender years, and wearing spectacles, at the other end of the table, and

who looked as if he never said anything but his beads—"tells me she is one of the loveliest."

"Excuse me, I—I—I—ah! beg pardon," gasped Mr. Cross.

"No, no. True; how stupid. I beg you ten thousand pardons, my dear Cross; it was my good friend, Mrs. Spellham, the postmistress."

"She's sure to know, Dr. Rudd," said Sir Jasper Cranebrook, a neighbouring baronet, on the other side of Mrs. Trevor, and opposite to the doctor. "But what did she say, that's the thing; for I've never heard the gentleman's name before? Coffee—what did you call him?"

"Cophetua! Cophetua! Sir Jasper," said the doctor impatiently.

"I see, Coffeechewer—something in the East; Indian, I suppose?"

They were all most probably listening for the story, as nobody set Sir Jasper right, nor laughed; but it takes a bold man at a country dinner party to laugh at a baronet.

"She's a very pretty woman, doctor, if you mean our organist," said Marmaduke Trevor himself, from the end of the table.

"Duke admires her exceedingly," interposed

Mrs. Trevor; "and she is a very good-looking woman," she added, correcting her want of generosity at once.

"And I suppose she hasn't much money," rejoined the doctor, "so there's the beggar-maid at once. Well, so far so good; but my informant tells me that she's going to be married to a nobleman, who came down with her in the train, and fell in love with her. They say he's a friend of Carnaby's."

"Dear me," said Lady Cranebrook, an angular looking woman in a strange head-dress, and very handsome old-fashioned diamonds, with white gloves many sizes too long in the fingers, "how very foolish of Lady Carnaby to encourage such a preposterous *mésalliance*."

Baronets' ladies, living within ten miles of each other, when there is a considerable difference of age or beauty, often look at the same thing from different points of view. Besides, Lady Carnaby was a peer's daughter, and that was, though not impossible, difficult to forgive by one—who was not.

Mrs. Trevor thought it only honest to put her guest right as to the fact of her friend's con-

nivance; and she did so, so as to produce some question as to the authenticity of the romance altogether—

"He's not a nobleman, Lady Cranebrook," said she, "and I don't know that they are going to be married."

"Well, I tell you my authority," repeated Dr. Rudd.

"I've seen Mrs. Gray and Mr. Deloraine walking together occasionally between the village and Sir George's," said the Vicar of Burnham, who was somewhat afraid of Dr. Rudd.

"Not going to be married!" said Lady Cranebrook tartly, and looking very virtuously indignant. "So much the worse for the village."

Whether she meant as regards the poor-rates, or what, nobody stopped to inquire; but Mrs. Trevor replied, while Marmaduke Trevor, with a dry sense of humour, laughed at intervals to himself.

"I mean, Lady Cranebrook, that we know nothing about it officially. A Mr. Deloraine, staying at the Manor House, is the culprit; and as he certainly was an old acquaintance of Mrs. Gray, when she lived in Ireland, and she is daily

governess to Lady Carnaby's children, they may have walked between the two houses together without the necessity of being engaged. Of course, I've heard that they are, but I can't tell where, and I hardly believe it."

"Deloraine," said the doctor, holding his glass for champagne. "I recollect him, a most promising young man at Christ Church; very good fortune, and a fine place somewhere in the south of Ireland. Why shouldn't he marry who he likes?"

"And who is Mrs. Gray, my dear Mr. Trevor?" said Lady Cranebrook, "now we've found out all about Mr. Deloraine, for I don't suppose Dr. Rudd knows that."

"She got her music, which is excellent, in Germany."

"Her music! Yes; but herself—that's the question, you know, who is she?"

"She was strongly recommended by a friend of the Carnabys'; and as there could be no doubt about her capability, as the vicar will tell you, we took her for organist. She taught some of the farmers' children for a very short time, and has been Lady Carnaby's governess ever since."

"And now she's going to marry, whom did you say, Dr. Rudd?"

"I said I had been told she was going to marry a nobleman."

"Ah! but she's not. Who was it that walked with her about the fields?"

"A Mr. Deloraine," said the vicar.

"I was told a nobleman," said Dr. Rudd.

"And he has a large fortune. Well, it's as good as a nobleman."

Dr. Rudd was about to object to this short-cut syllogism of Lady Cranebrook, but he was fortunately stopped by an inquiry about the cuneiform characters in the British Museum.

The doctor commenced well, as he always did; sonorously, and very blandly, assuming considerable inferiority on the part of his auditors, and affectionate solicitude for their information on his own. He said they were Persian, Median, and Assyrian—threefold, in fact; wedges and arrows crossed in a variety of ways. But finding himself very soon out of his depth, he plunged into a question which had been asked on the other side of the table, as to the merits of Peters, Holland, and Courtenay as

carriage builders, and shone conspicuously until it was time for the ladies to leave the table. King Cophetua and the beggar-maid was not again brought upon the tapis, and whatever the opinions of the guests on the story of the widow and Deloraine, no expression was given to them.

It was now summer; Deloraine had been up and down as it suited him, and Myra had resigned without explanation her situation at Burnham. She was not a person whom, as the organist, the vicar would have ventured to question.

She was away from her cottage in the village; and as each day had brought her renewed security from her great fear, and increased confidence in Deloraine's affection, she began to regard her past year as one only of wholesome probation. "I stood in need of it," she said to herself, "and God has given me strength to pass it well. Now he will reward me for it." She was without those wonderful presentiments which are made, by novelists, to embitter our happiest days. A too prudent mind meets sorrow half-way, and a gloomy one counts those

which never really come to it. Myra did neither; the doubts she had felt were, and would have been to many, reasonable; and when she thought there was no longer reason for doubt, she gave herself up to a happy dream which she believed would now be realised, without a vision of past or coming trouble to disturb it.

Again, she was a girl; she was once more riding and fishing. Her sympathies were with the friends who surrounded her; she remembered her troubles with Lady Honoria, and her playfulness with Lady Catherine, and the petting of the kind old peer, who was her friend at all times. The black gulf which separated that life from the present she bridged over as best she could. It was over; and Mrs. Montressor, and her German friends, and the Countess de Horsemann, and her balls, and music, and entrance upon life, though not without their pleasant spots upon memory's waste, might go with the rest; Mathilde and Gilbert Ferrers, and her own uncontrolled will and selfishness; no one should be blamed but herself. Sometimes she thought she might have been better looked after; but who was to blame? not her kind old

guardian; nor Honoria, who had done all for the best; and when Deloraine came in, as he once did, and found her in a dark hour, she threw herself upon his breast, and knew that was the place on which all her weakness might repose. "For you know it is weakness, Henry; all retrospect is weakness; but henceforth I will look forward." And so she did. And then he took her in his arms, and kissed the tears away, which settled upon her lids, and talked to her of all she should see and do again in Ireland; and how that the friends that had known her would welcome her back; for that she was a brave, good woman, and as honest and bright-hearted as the day. Every word of which was true. But there was a trouble to go through yet, on which one of them had not calculated.

I said she had been in the village, on a visit of mercy. She was singing as she came back, and stopped, on this evening in June, just as the red sun was setting, to say a few words to Ben Duckett, who had lost a swarm of bees. She knew no more of bees than of men-of-war (I don't mean soldiers), but she mustered up some store of old childish knowledge about

brass kettles, and ringing of bells, and shovels and tongs, and left the old man comparatively happy, in that he had had such a visitant. She had finished by buying all the honey he had or was likely to have that season.

As she walked to her own house she turned down the little lane towards the garden-gate; she passed through the garden, now in the full beauty of summer's brightest colouring, thinking of the quiet home, with mingled feelings, which she had had among these simple people. The house-door was partially open, and as she pushed it to enter she saw a man sitting in a chair, with his back towards her. On her entering he rose quickly to his feet, and turned round; altered and disguised, unshorn and shabby, she knew him in a moment. Gilbert Ferrers stood before her!

CHAPTER XI.

A TERRIBLE INTERVIEW.

MYRA uttered no cry; her astonishment was too great, the shock too sudden for speech. Daylight struck terror to the heart of King John when he would have invoked a murder, "the world was all too wanton and too full of gauds to give him utterance." The glaring fact was too full of terrible reality to give to Myra the utterance of one cry of sorrow. Terror-stricken for the moment she stood on her own hearth, her eyes glazed, dry, and distorted; her face and lips pale and bloodless.

Gilbert Ferrers stood and looked at her. He was pale too; but there was no pity, no remorse in his emaciated appearance; nor did his cold and callous eye awaken any for him in his wife.

He wore a thick dark beard and moustache; and his dress, which was old and soiled, gave him the appearance of a foreigner. A stranger would certainly not have recognised the once handsome, smartly-dressed Londoner; but Myra's instincts on the subject were indomitable. She was the first to speak; for her brave heart told her at once that she had need of all her courage, and she shook herself together for the conflict.

"Gilbert Ferrers!" said she. It was a cry of recognition, not of terror. "You here?"

"Yes, Myra. You see I'm back again."

"And with what purpose?" Myra's spirit always rose with the occasion. She was always the most cowardly when there was the least opposition.

"To live the life of a Christian, instead of a dog. You, I suppose, are surprised to find me living at all?" added he with a sort of brutality.

"You might have spared me the pain of answering such a question."

"Yes; by staying away altogether. But I've had enough of it, and would rather die than live the felon's life I have lately gone through."

"Felon's life!" repeated Myra, not exactly understanding him.

"Felon's life in all but the name. I escaped the fate, as you see."

"But which you admit you deserved. I think so too."

"The question is not what you think, but what the world has power to inflict. It has none over me; but if it can give me no bread, or bread only, I would as soon be out of the world as in it." And he looked at her fixedly.

"Have you tracked me out to tell me this, Gilbert Ferrers; or have you some scheme by which you think I can assist in giving you more than bread?"

"I think that you can feed the hungry; for I have ascertained that enough has passed lately out of your hands to have done so. If you had it in your power to assist him, your first duty was to your husband."

"My first duty has been paid, with the superfluities of a bare subsistence, where it was due, to my husband's creditors."

"Ah! so I heard," said he, laughing coldly. "What business had you with them? What do

you suppose your house, and pictures, and jewels, were available for: to feed a pack of cormorants, who only suffered because they wanted more for their money than their money's worth? When one man wins, another must lose; and I only robbed the robbers. Do them good."

"You did not come here to defend yourself or your frauds, I presume. Why did you come at all?"

"Because my good fortune so far befriended me. I escaped from the police."

"It seems impossible that society can have suffered so great a wrong."

"Society had not half so much to do with it as a knowledge of swimming. You know I can swim like a Newfoundland dog."

"It's a pity some other of his qualities have not been cultivated by you."

"Be that as it may, I got to a small fishing-smack, which had broken away in the gale (almost the only one that was not visited by the police), and was put ashore the next morning on the French coast."

"It matters little to me by what means you

are here. The circumstances of your escape can give you no fresh claims upon me. You know best whether you are disposed to enforce those which already exist."

"The circumstances of my life after my escape may have modified my views upon that subject. You shall hear them, Myra." And Gilbert Ferrers seated himself.

"Let it be brief, then. My patience is not enduring."

"Listen, then. I was without money, friends, or food. I begged my way in a foreign language into the interior. I subsisted on charity till I got back to Calais. Here I fell in with a Frenchman, whom I had known previously. You will call card-sharping at *écarté*, and billiards, dishonest modes of procuring a livelihood: I do not. The first law of nature is self-preservation. I have always acted on it; and, by a necessary prolongation of such reasoning, self-preservation in its highest extent is the consequence."

Myra stood entranced by the innate rascality of the man she called her husband, and which was as new to her as his arrival was unlooked for.

Gilbert Ferrers continued, "Some men can live on a penny roll and an ounce and a half of butter, a *côtelette*, and a glass of absinthe, a day. I cannot. I wished for better food, better clothes, better lodging. I was told that patience in evil-doing would acquire them. But I have no patience. You know that I have usually jumped to results."

"Had I known a tenth part of what I know now, I should have known no more."

"*N'importe.* The knowledge has grown upon you when it was too late to repudiate it. But it was impossible to live upon five francs a day precariously earned: I flew at higher game, and the police were upon me."

By this time Myra, who had been standing defiantly before him, sat down.

"It was time to return to England; and I succeeded in eluding their vigilance, great as it is. I am here, a beggar, starving, but married to a woman who can give me food and shelter for a day, at least. I am come for that."

Myra waited for a moment, while her breath went and came with unnatural rapidity. No wonder! But she turned herself towards him,

and replied, with as much calmness as she could muster—

"Never! By no act of mine shall my name ever be linked with yours again. I have foresworn it, and no power on earth shall make me willingly bear it."

"You said willingly."

"I said willingly. What the law may do I know not. You would not yourself invoke it. Even now I suffer at your hands a wrong so bitter, so terrible to bear, that no power but One could enable me to fight against it. I will fight against it, and learn to look upon the infliction as a blessing—to kiss the rod which I have made for myself."

Ferrers laughed insolently.

"So, then, what I heard was true? Now we shall come to terms. You were about to be married; a whisper of this has reached me. It was to a rich man, who will not allow his revenues to be squandered in paying a gullible public, ready to fall victims to any delusion."

Myra sat still, as pale as death, only wondering to what length his audacity would carry him.

"But," continued he, "why need this suffering you speak of be inflicted? I have no fancy for playing with malice; and the funds which you would lavish upon undeserving and inappreciative victims, may be better employed in levelling the only obstacle that prevents the fulfilment of your wishes."

The language was only so far obscure, that Myra could not at once comprehend the extent of its wickedness.

"Ah! you don't understand. Is it true you would marry Deloraine? My name is no longer Ferrers; I am in this country, now and for ever, George Franklin. Gilbert Ferrers carries no luck with it, and like you, Mrs. Gray, I have changed it."

Still Myra sat looking at him almost unconsciously, and not at the moment quite comprehending the proposal. Ferrers, on the contrary, was speaking with a cool indifference which helped to obscure her sense of his intention. He had not changed colour, and, excepting that his voice had become lower and his words had come more slowly, there had been no marked difference since his entrance.

"Do you mean that you are known here as George Franklin, and that—"

"Consequently you need no longer be known as my wife," interposed he with amazing effrontery, as though he were conscious of a favour he was conferring.

"It is not my intention to be known as your wife henceforward, beyond the absolute necessities of so cruel a fate."

"You're not polite nor grateful, considering the offer I am about to make you. It may suit you better to be known as my widow; the advantages will be considerable to you." He paused to see the effect his communication had produced, and perceiving none, he proceeded—"But it must be paid for; and as the gain will be great, the payment should be proportionate."

"You had better name your terms," she said coldly.

"I will; details can be arranged hereafter. I am starving, without a prospect before me. In its present condition life is simply worthless. I have told you my opinion of five francs a day: it is worse than nothing; it is an excuse for virtue to cry out against the stratagems of abso-

lute want. Give me five hundred a year;"—Myra stared, as well she might—"it will furnish me on the Continent with the necessities and one or two of the comforts of life, and counted in francs it sounds respectable. Give me that, and you shall never be troubled with me again, till the day you forget to remit it."

Myra still stared in undisguised amazement.

"Five hundred a year!" said she, almost laughing. "And where shall I find five hundred a-year? From the generosity of my aunt or the labours of my hands?"

"I think you and Deloraine can settle that between you."

"Deloraine!" said Myra, with her eyes wide open. "Mr. Deloraine is to give me five hundred a year!"—she spoke very deliberately, for she had lost all temper and all fear in the lapse of time that had been allowed her—"to obtain permission for me to live as your widow!"

"Why not? You're worth it, I'm sure, to anybody who can think so. You're to marry him, are you not?"

"To marry Mr. Deloraine with you alive!"

"Marry him, or anything else you please, if

you have scruples. I presume he won't grudge the five hundred a year, if he cares about you, and is as well off as report says."

Myra stood up, but replied quite calmly—

"You must not be surprised that I should not have understood your meaning before this. I have listened to your trials since your escape with more patience than you had a right to expect. Listen to mine."

Ferrers nodded his head and smiled; for, with a certain contempt for bad manners in others, and an exterior which had deceived many, he was utterly without that dignity which not unfrequently accompanies bad men in their grossest moments.

"When I was a girl, with no experience of the world, I married you."

"It's as well you should admit it, if you don't mean to pay the money."

"Why so, may I ask?" Insult had strung Myra's nerves.

"Because whatever property you have or make belongs to me."

"And yours to your creditors. You married me under circumstances which with honourable

men would have ensured additional protection. In a month, such was your anxiety to take the little money I possessed that you could no longer keep the secret of your inclination. I was not the woman to refuse you; but it was early to wake from my dream."

"I took it for our mutual benefit, and used it for it."

"The stories of your antecedents, your position in life, a father whose caprices you could not humour, but whose entailed property would be yours, the popularity and estimation of your friends in England, and all the captivating additions to the romance of our situation I already knew to be falsehoods: you did not hesitate to confess as much."

"My father's caprices exist, so does the property—not the entail."

"The falsehoods I would have forgiven, could I have believed that they were the result of your affection for me. I had reason to think otherwise; and though you had sufficient decency at that time to throw dust in my eyes, it was only that you might the more ruthlessly pillage me of what remained of my fortune."

"A milkscore, that would have found us in gloves and shoes."

"A milkscore which you thought it worth while to secure by dishonest means. Were there any indignities I was not made to suffer? When I was not left alone, the society you brought to my house was scarcely fit for—for yourself—certainly not for a young married woman. Usually I was turned over to the judgment of my own years."

"The result proves highly satisfactory," said he, parenthetically.

"I was without reproach, save the reproach which a stainless life must have cast upon your own. I was subject at last to the indignity of a blow."

"And with reason; you were jealous."

"Jealous! and with what cause? Were my suspicions well or ill founded? The woman who had been my companion, my governess, who had fed my childish vanity and sensibility beyond their natural excesses, was your mistress. You cannot deny it. I stood by her bedside, and, as she was dying, forgave her for her treachery; but I cannot forgive you." As this

fact was new to Gilbert Ferrers, he winced a little, but recovered his composure immediately. "And I heard of your frauds, your robberies, your plausible rascalities, after I had probed your falsehood to myself. I tried to love you long after all my respect was gone. I say 'tried,' but you would not let me; and it did not need that you should have been a convicted felon (for I would have kept your secret) that I should loathe you. Your indifference to the decencies of your home was the sequel to your public disgrace." Here Gilbert Ferrers looked away from his wife, as if he were at last touched. In another moment he had resumed his cold, cynical manner. "That I would have forgiven these insults, I do not say; that I could have forgotten them is impossible; but I would have given you bread, and made you welcome to the half of my labours. Worldly goods I have none; but I respect the promise I made before God, and would thus far have served you, though I never would willingly have shared your disgrace or your name."

Gilbert Ferrers was almost touched, or pretended to be so—

"Myra!"

"You have not heard me out. I did not think it was in your power to insult me more. I was mistaken. In your last proposition you have convinced me that you do not know me, that you can never know me, and that, with all my efforts at honesty and self-restraint, you think me part and parcel of yourself. You do me grievous wrong now, and the gentleman, too, whom you have so grossly slandered." With these words Myra drew herself up, and pointing to the door with an imperious gesture, said, "Leave the cottage."

"You mean that, Myra? Is it to be peace or war?"

"There has been no peace; there can be none for me, while you are on earth; but leave me now. If you have legal rights, claim them by the proper channel. All but those rights I will resist to the uttermost: leave this house."

"Leave this house, indeed!" repeated Gilbert Ferrers, with a sneer. "Do you know that I am here by right; do you know that I claim to share this house with you!"

"You will not share this house with me, sir.

Rather than suffer the indignity, I will leave you undivided possession of it." And Myra proceeded to tie on a bonnet with as much calmness as she could assume. Her hands, however, had begun to tremble, and her temper was rising. Her face had changed its character, and a hard, settled determination shone through her eyes.

"You mean that, Myra?" he asked, with some tone of doubt.

"I mean that if I leave this house to-night, by your design, or by the moral force by which you would expel me, I will denounce you to the police"—Gilbert Ferrers laughed sarcastically—"not as the manager of the bank from the sale of which, from one board of directors to another, you put into your own pocket three thousand pounds without their knowledge, but as the accomplice of the felons who are now undergoing hard labour at Portland Island for the forgeries committed in foreign bills. I am no longer the child you cajoled and robbed, but a woman who has had to think for herself, and has had strength given her to do so. Will you go?"

Without another word, and with a look of malicious insolence, Gilbert Ferrers opened the door and went out.

Myra sat down, and tried to recover herself. The interview had been almost too much for her, but she had borne herself bravely. Now came the reaction; and she had a dreary waste of prospect before her. Lately all had been smiling; the sorrow of her life had been silently fading away. And now that little cloud like a man's hand had come up out of the far South, and had grown into a dark array of tempestuous masses, to which there seemed no break, no end. Long she sat, thinking of her miserable past, her more miserable future: a future unbroken, unsoftened by any ray of solace or of hope. The silent tears chased each other down her cheeks long into the summer night. And she sat by the clustering honeysuckle, and the tangled roses that grew by her cottage window, till the chill dews had settled upon the flowers and the grass below; and the cold night air struck upon her feverish eyelids, and warned her of the hours that had passed, since she returned to her cottage in the dry, red glow of a summer twilight.

Having indulged her grief, which was, after all, partly the result of the unnatural tension and sudden relaxation of her feelings, she began to see that some action must be taken in her coming struggle. But it will be seen that Myra was exactly the woman to do what was right, and to do it thoroughly, when she only knew what the right was. There are plenty of them; they are far more common than men; but it is in judgment that they fail. There is their inferiority; and considering the number of their excellences, they may concede without grudging it. Myra was ready, or would be ready after a night's rest, to do; but then what to do she did not know. She really suffered less than others who had not the same elasticity of mind; but that she suffered less was owing entirely to her own good heart, her constitutional courage, her religious sentiment (for self-help is no inconsiderable part of Christian duty), and must be therefore placed to her account. The first thing that struck her was that Deloraine should know it. The second, that he was not the person to apply to for advice under the circumstances, though she felt that none would give honester or better.

But it must be a woman. Honest as she felt herself to be, she was not one of those virtue-armed Amazons that can brave the world's opinion. She liked to have it with her; and independence smacked somewhat of impropriety or defiance. She had modified her character since she dared to think for herself in the matter of marriage; and, indeed, her earliest essay in that line had not been encouraging.

Well, there was but one woman whom she could consult, and that was Lady Carnaby, in whose house her avowed lover was staying.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SLEEP OF THE JUST AND OF THE UNJUST.

MEANWHILE Gilbert Ferrers strode along the road to D——, black as night. So long as he was before his wife he retained his cool, insolent, mocking manner; but no sooner had he left her than his real position struck him too forcibly for refuge in cynicism. It was not that he cared for his wife; but he liked neither being baffled by a woman who for a short time had been under his thumb, nor the prospect of starvation, which her last words held out to him. In very truth, with all his swagger about his love of luxury, and his preposterous bargaining for so many hundreds when he had not six pennies to rub against one another, it was come to that. And with him it

was scarcely a question of public charity. Public charity meant public recognition, disgrace, and punishment; if that scoundrel Potter was only on him, or that German vagabond had split, he would not be taken to the casual ward, or to a debtors' prison, but he would have to make closer acquaintance with a felon's cell. Poverty, therefore, was death to him; and his only escape lay in a present supply, by which he might start once more in the race of life: a race which, with his unscrupulous conscience, in another country would lead to victory. He only wanted enough to get away, a few hundreds or so, less than that indeed; but a fair sum for a respectable start was absolutely necessary, and without that he might as well be dead.

He had started after sunset, indeed about ten o'clock. The night was close, and from the west and south arose heavy banks of dark violet clouds, betokening a storm during the night. A low, surging wind came up, and he hurried on to avoid rain; for, though careless about life or death, he was particular about catching cold, or getting wet through. He walked

through the dismal street of D——, the small out-of-the-way country town, which had rejected railroads for posters with a laughable short-sightedness, and now regretted it in a lost name, lost trade, and long-buried respectability. The broad splashes of rain were falling at intervals, heralding a thunder storm, which rumbled afar off, as he turned the corner, and made for a low public-house in a back lane, which was known as the Man-at-Arms. It was a dirty-looking place, without lights or sign of life, though they were still shining from some houses in the town, and was, as it looked, the occasional resort of poachers who infested the neighbourhood, and who held their meetings occasionally in an old barn on the premises, under the excuse of winter skittles under cover. At this season of the year there were some who pursued the less dangerous occupation of egg-stealing in the adjacent country, which was famous for game, though on the night in question no one appeared to disturb its quiet.

Gilbert Ferrers turned and stopped at the door, which was closed. He tried the latch, and then knocked gently with his knuckles.

It was opened after a few seconds, and then as carefully closed again. There was a light from a low window on his left hand, which showed an inner room, called the bar. It was now dark and deserted; on the right, and opposite the window, was a staircase, old, tortuous, and creaky. The one commanded the other. Further on Gilbert Ferrers heard oaths and smelt tobacco; but it was in a back kitchen, given over to a very rough lot, and purposely shut off from what might be called, from courtesy, the front of the house.

He turned at once up-stairs, and was met on the landing by some one coming out of a room directly over the bar. It was the landlord himself, with a light, who greeted him with a familiarity which would have struck as quite extraordinary any one acquainted with Ferrers' antecedents; and indeed they were yet very different looking men.

The landlord was a rough, powerful-looking man, cleanly shaven, with closely-cropped hair, and a professional face, having in early life been a prize-fighter. He had a rather pleasant smile, when not displeased, which, however, was not

upon all occasions. He had been in prison for accidentally killing a man in a quarrel; and, as prison discipline does not act beneficially upon all minds, he had, since that time, set himself a little against society. As he was the harbourer of all the thieves, poachers, and vagabonds around, society had much the worst of it. He would argue the point learnedly, and with great good humour, with anybody, the curate of the parish inclusive, that as society had wronged him and made him what he was, society could look out for itself.

"It first sent me to jail," said he, "for an accident, and then turned me out of it a beggar with nothing to do. I wouldn't rob you, sir, nor any one else as I knows on; but I wouldn't go out o' my way to prevent any body else doin' it. Society makes the thieves, and then puts temptation in their ways, so society may employ her own police." He lighted Gilbert to the door, and went in.

The room was not uncomfortably furnished for its class. It had a rather ragged carpet, curtains, a round table, half-a-dozen chairs, two of which were easy chairs, a short couch.

shutters closely shut, and on the table hot water, a bottle, sugar, glasses, pipes, and a pack of exceedingly dirty cards.

"Here's your friend, Mountjoy, my boy, and if you want to talk to him, now's your time. I must look after the quids down-stairs; they're rum 'uns to slope now the old 'ooman's away." Saying which, he left the room, closing the door gently.

Mr. Mountjoy, on nearer inspection, proved to be no other than our old acquaintance, whose affability so charmed Ben Duckett, and who had assumed the name and the office of Mathilde's brother when in search of Mrs. Ferrers. We need hardly say he was one of Gilbert Ferrers' companions in the forgeries of foreign bills, but had escaped by a fortunate accident on that occasion. He had lived with him ever since. He had disclosed to Ferrers the secret of his wife's home, and that had presented to him the hope of profiting by her exertions now that all other resources were gone. A chance visit to Mathilde had decided his plans, from some vague notion that Mrs. Ferrers might be useful to him; and, when down in the neighbour-

hood, he made much of his time, as we shall see.

"At last, Fer—Franklin; that's a foolish habit of mine."

"It's not the only one," said the other, throwing himself down on the couch.

"Well, p'raps not. Habits are tyrants," replied Mountjoy, moralising, "whom we may escape if we cannot conquer. Drink, Franklin." And he pushed the bottle of spirits to him.

"I can't drink that mess, though I'm thirsty; I could drink claret, or champagne, or—or—" And here Ferrers looked with disgust at the preparations for his entertainment.

"Say brandy and soda—say something within reach. D—— it—nothing! Then let's pull the bell, and see what can be done with the genius of the ring. We'll summon him." And having rung, the Shaver, as he was called by his friends, appeared.

"What's up, gentlemen; anything wanted in my way?" And, with a leer, he enumerated various dainties, and at last reached champagne.

"Iced, I suppose, Shaver?" said Mountjoy, who had known him long before.

"Not exactly; but it's good. There's sometimes a call for it here, and you shall have it." And in another five minutes it was on the table.

Gilbert did not refuse to drink it, though he knew nothing of Mountjoy's resources. He only knew his own were quite inadequate to pay for it, and was very little troubled about that. After a tumbler he felt better.

"And how did you succeed, Franklin? since you like your new name."

"Not at all. She either has not the power, or not the will, to help me. I suspect she has neither. The marriage I don't believe in."

"I do. I have a legal mind; and though you spoke of habits deprecatingly, I have habits of business. I think she can——"

"Well, then, she won't!" said Ferrers, angry again at having to admit his failure.

"Then I will. You have told me that if you could start again, you would still make a fortune. Is it so?"

"Did I ever fail? Haven't I made enough out of nothing for three fortunes?"

"Ah, but it's gone," said Mr. Mountjoy, who had a practical mind.

"That's nothing to do with it. It was there, and you——"

"Would have kept it, you were going to say. Undoubtedly I should."

"I was going to say nothing of the sort. I was going to ask how you proposed to make another?"

"Come over here, and I'll tell you. The Shaver's a good fellow, but will trust nobody. What you want, you want at once. I must get away from here: the sooner the better. Are you ready for an enterprise to-night?"

Gilbert helped himself to champagne, and then Mountjoy rang for more. After it had been brought, and the Shaver had again retired, he said—

"Are you for a cut? I beg pardon; it sounds better so; but I know your nerves. Will you do a burglary, or cry, 'Stand and deliver'?"

"Which is the most profitable?" said Ferrers, after a moment's hesitation.

"The bank here can be got at to-night. There's no doubt about it; for I have been on a

tour of inspection when I was here before. I renewed my inquiries to-day. The difficulties are less, the plunder greater; for yesterday a large quantity of notes, the result of last Lady-Day's rents, were paid in. Some of the swag is difficult of negotiation; but it would do. You don't like the name?"

"Burglary," said Ferrers, with his usual coolness. "It's no worse than the five hundred francs we got out of the villa at Amiens; but this is no use unless it's in sovereigns. What's the other?"

"A swell, whose tenants pay their rents to-morrow at a village three miles from here, dines with them, leaving his agent to collect the money, and come home afterwards. He lives beyond here, not far from Burnham, and is proud, I'm told, of always walking with the money, notes and gold, safely along the road. He has done it for twenty years. Vanity ruins more men than wit saves."

"The agent or the proprietor?" said Ferrers, thinking of himself, not of his companion's axiom.

"The agent. This regularity of life must be

broken in upon. Say the word, Franklin, and he shall do so no more."

"The risk?"

"Is nothing, after a heavy dinner, beer, and public-house spirits and water. There is a place well adapted for it. The road runs through the forest, and he seldom starts before evening."

"To-morrow, you said? I wish it was to-night. Are we safe here for another four-and-twenty hours? Can you trust your friend?"

"Thoroughly. He's an honest man, true to his principles: he meddles with nobody; but we will not trust him. Leave it to me; I know the country. We must ride, and we shall be miles from here before such a thing is known in the county town. We'll go northwards and separate at once: our next place of meeting shall be Paris. Say that you consent, and we'll swim in the same boat." And before they went to bed—for they did not separate—they had arranged to take their chance on the morrow at laying the foundation of another fortune.

When a man has lived all his life with his hand in the pockets of other people, it must not be supposed that he retains much delicacy as to

the mode in which his principle of life is to be carried out. At the same time, there are bank directors and railway managers who would think many times before committing a highway robbery or breaking into a house. Their previous avocations have hardened them to the sufferings of widows, orphans, and retired officials, civil and military, but not to their own; and a direct route to the galleys they think it for the most part desirable to avoid. It is but a few of them who have attained that undesirable end, however much they may have deserved it.

But the antecedents of Gilbert Ferrers had been always bad, and perhaps the most respectable part of his life was when he was beating and ruining his wife, and swindling under the *soubriquet* of "managing" for other people. Since then he had been very low indeed—low in resources and in company. Escape had led to the necessity for replenishing his purse; he had done so, at the suggestion of a companion, by robbing a widow lady in the neighbourhood of Amiens, and had done so cleverly enough to escape detection. He had spent, and lost and won alternately in silver hells on the Continent

what he stole; but it had kept him afloat for a time; and now he was again in England, ready for another start in life, but not knowing where to find it. It was not remarkable that Mr. Mountjoy's scheme of highway robbery should present itself with some plausible features for his consideration. The longer he slept upon it (and he did not get up till long after midday) the more feasible it appeared.

His friend, Mountjoy, was a genius in his way; but he was a pure thief by profession, and contemplated nothing higher than the successful issue of his rascalities. He had, so to speak, no sense of higher responsibilities, which might sometimes assail Ferrers, no foundation for pride. He had been *fripon* and *friponneau*—nothing beyond it; and though a genius and a moralist, "full of wise saws and modern instances," he was as happy in a burglary or a highway robbery, as in a scheme of card sharping or petty larceny. He had fallen into the grander schemes of Ferrers, and having been useful to him on the Continent during his great foreign bill transactions (for he was as much Frenchman as Englishman), and much *lié* with

Mathilde von Robeck of necessity, he was now become a sort of jackall's provider to the higher branch of the profession. They had been sharers in misery for the last twelve months; and it is truer to say that the greater scoundrel had now come down to the lesser, than that any elevation had taken place in this vicious association on the other side.

When Ferrers stretched himself in bed for the last time before getting up on that eventful morning, Mr. Mountjoy was many miles away, bargaining for horses, visors, and other necessary aids to their dishonest designs.

While these schemers of iniquity had been sleeping soundly upon their design, the one of them till about one o'clock of the day, Myra had also been endeavouring to find forgetfulness in slumber. She had found it; but it was short, fitful, and feverish; and though she had retired late, she had no inducement to remain in bed after the sun had thrown his beams upon the little, old-fashioned casement panes, penetrating the roses and leaves which surrounded the little windows. Her thoughts were, indeed, as they are apt to be after waking from uncertain sleep,

conscious of a great sorrow, and she was not two seconds before she had defined it; and the moment after she remembered the determination she had come to the night before, and began to reconsider it. The result was the same; she would first see Deloraine, and then make a *confidante* of Lady Carnaby; for was not the secret his as well as hers, and he had a right to be consulted. At the same time, Myra wanted a *confidante:* her trouble, which had never been too much for her before, had got the better of her now, and she wanted help to grapple with it.

She would not go to the Manor House too early, so she postponed her visit till luncheon time, when she would be sure to find not only Lady Carnaby, but Sir George and Deloraine, at home. There was no hunting now, and usually the men were not sorry to be in on idle days when the sun was at his highest. She herself had too much on her mind to be daunted by weather, which was cooler and fresher since the storm of last night. When she reached the Manor House, she found Lady Carnaby and her children, but neither Sir George nor Deloraine were there.

"You did not expect to find me alone, Myra?" said Lady Carnaby, carelessly; but, on looking at her more attentively, she saw something had happened. Even Myra was scarcely strong enough to conceal her momentary vexation, although she had successfully contended with the signs of her real trouble. She had had in her late years more experience of great sorrows than of little disappointments. "You don't look well. Is there anything wrong, or is it the heat?"

"It is not the heat; and if you'll allow me, I'll lunch with you, for I came from Burnham without any. The fact is, I wanted to see Mr. Deloraine; but if he is not at home, it must keep." She spoke boldly, but she felt it would keep very badly.

"Is that all? Then I'm afraid it must keep till the evening; and you'll stay to dinner. We'll send you home in the evening."

"They'll not be home till dinner-time, then?" she asked, with some perturbation, which Lady Carnaby was too well-bred to notice.

"You'll dine with me. I don't expect George home till late. It's his rent-day at Nethercliffe."

"At Nethercliffe?" repeated Myra slowly, not thinking of anything but the necessity of keeping her secret till to-morrow.

"Yes, my dear. I forgot; you don't know anything about Nethercliffe. I'll tell you while you lunch. What do you think of that, missy? There's your friend, Mrs. Gray, has never been to Nethercliffe—never seen the robber's cave up in the cliff, nor the old farmhouse where papa was born."

The child expressed her astonishment by calling her "toopid Mammy Gay," and by proposing to take her to look at it to-morrow.

"No; I've never been to Nethercliffe, and I don't know, dear, what your papa is doing there now; so you see I am very 'toopid,' baby."

"Then mamma will tell her. My dear Myra, George's principal property is at and round Nethercliffe; and so one half-year his rents are paid here, and the other half at Nethercliffe; and the March or Lady-Day rent is paid to-day. It's the custom here to give them till noon."

"A very good custom, too; but why should that cause Sir George to be away from home all

day long? Does the money take so long to count?"

Lady Carnaby laughed.

"It's the custom also for all the tenants to dine together afterwards, and Sir George and his agent always attend. They dine, and have punch, and smoke long pipes; and when they pay pretty well, it's a very pleasant meeting. It wouldn't be the thing, George says, not to sit with them, and have a chat about the crops and the drainage question——"

"And to drink punch and smoke a long pipe. And is Mr. Deloraine gone with him?"

"Oh, yes! It's considered a compliment by the tenants to take a friend."

"Then I'm sure I ought not to grudge Sir George that pleasure, for he's never so pleased as when he's making others happy. And you say they won't be home till after dinner?"

"Not to-day. He usually leaves his agent, Mr. Foster, to entertain them, and is home here about seven himself, having spoilt a good dinner by a very late luncheon; but to-day he means to call on an old farmer, a tenant of his father's and grandfather's; and as he is sure to keep

him talking an hour or two, they'll not be here till nine or ten. We shall not wait dinner for them."

"Then, Lady Carnaby, you shall excuse me, and I'll see you and Mr. Deloraine to-morrow. I have plenty to do at home, and that arrangement will suit me better;" and on leaving her Myra insisted.

"Then, if you are obstinate, stay here till it's cooler, and I'll walk back with you. I want to call on Mrs. Trevor. If nobody calls here to prevent me, I'll make her five o'clock tea do till George and Mr. Deloraine come back. I dislike sitting down to dinner alone."

This arrangement suited them both; and Myra kept her secret to herself, fully determined that this night must, however, be the last. We have seen before that nothing was so burdensome to her as a mystery, and yet she was always bound to be involved in one.

She passed the evening as she best could. She worked, she read; and perhaps her sorrow and previous night's fatigue brought readier rest than she might have expected. If she had no hope, she had no fears. She knew the worst

now; and it was something always gained to Myra to have decided on a mode of action. Neither would she ever believe that the setting of a great hope was to be followed by endless despair, than that the setting sun was to be succeeded by endless night. She declined all such enervating theories. If her expectations could have been put into definite language, which they could not, it would not probably have been that some day her miserable husband would die, and she should be free from the chain that encumbered her; but rather that, with a sense of duty to bear it, her lot would become so tolerable as to be comparatively light. One consideration grieved her very much—that she must begin work again in self-defence, and that Burnham and its neighbourhood could be no place in which to recommence. Even in this matter she did not think it necessary to meet her trouble half-way. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

With the morning came more reflection, not of a brighter kind, excepting that it was nearer consummation. In two or three hours, at most, she would have given the man she loved best

the most fatal wound he could receive. He would know that her lot was as hard to bear as his; but if he had loved her as she believed, and as in truth he had, it would only add to the poignancy of the blow. And as the hour approached when she should no longer delay, with a rare inconsistency in her, she would have been glad that something could happen to postpone the meeting—not of her own contrivance. That Deloraine was gone to town, or that—— and then she came to the end of her probabilities of reprieve. What could a man be going to do in a country house in June, but put himself at her service. So she got up and put on her hat. At the same moment her faithful Jemima Ann opened the door, and presented a note.

"I hope you won't be angry, ma'am; but I thought you was looking so ill, that I took the liberty of sending for the doctor. I think this may be his note to say he's coming, for a boy left it in the kitchen, and said there was no answer."

Myra knew the writing better than Jemima Ann, and opened it with some impatience.

"MY DEAREST MYRA,—

"Carnaby and I are obliged to be in D—— the first thing this morning. I shall be sure to call coming back, however late, but it is impossible to say at what time; only do not go out before you have seen me, unless it is to Lady Carnaby. God bless you, dearest Myra; and believe me

"Yours ever,

"H. D."

Myra took off her hat, and sat down to read this short note again. Gone to D——; well, it could be nothing that concerned her; but she must once more postpone her communication. Go to Lady Carnaby? No, certainly not. Her heart was very heavy, and she wanted consolation; but she would wait for it, until her heart's heaviest burden was removed. But there was something very wearying in this postponement; and her total inaction produced an irritability quite unnatural to Myra. She sat down with the note open before her. She thought it must be the last she ever could receive from him in such language; and as she

leant her head upon her hand, tears fell fast and silently upon the paper. Then she took it and placed it carefully in her desk, with other souvenirs of a dawning happiness, which the cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, seemed destined to shut out for ever.

CHAPTER XIII.

AN OLD-FASHIONED GAME SPOILT.

THERE was a cheerful and rather noisy party at dinner in a fine old room of the Castle Inn, Nethercliffe, on the day of which we have been writing. It consisted of some fourteen or fifteen persons, all, with the exception of three, being manifestly of the class of tenant-farmers. They looked like steady, well-to-do men, of various ages. Their dress, as a rule, denoted their devotion to country pursuits, consisting either of breeches and top-boots or gaiters; broad-skirted coats, of shiny black or dark-coloured cloths; and metal buttons and gaily coloured waistcoats were more common than the older fashioned rolls of white neck-cloth, and the sombre colours in

which one or two of the older tenants had presented themselves before their landlord. One or two, indeed, regarding the paying of their rent almost in the light of a religious ceremony (a feeling which, it is to be regretted, is not quite universal), had donned their Sunday suit from head to foot; and would have been as presentable at a funeral as a rent-dinner.

Things had gone off very well. There was a defaulter or two; and if Barker did make a wry face over the waste of a new barn, and the mischief that "they confounded harriers of Squire Jelly's had done his fences," he was promised some consideration in next year's draining. There was no necessity for returning anything this time; and landlord and tenants, to look at their faces through the steam of the boiled beef, and roast fowls, and ham, which were circulating freely, were well pleased with one another. At the top of the table, the exceptions to the class above mentioned, sat Sir George Carnaby, and on his right hand his friend, Deloraine. The vice-chair was taken by Mr. William Foster, an active, self-confident sort of person, of about forty years of age, Sir George's steward, who

had his confidence increased by the fact that he had in an inner pocket about fifteen hundred pounds of his employer's money, in notes, besides a few other securities of some value. Farmers have a way of drawing forth all sorts of monies from a canvas bag, and depositing it in the hand of the recipient, accompanied by odd cheques, taken in the way of business from all sorts of persons. It is a fine primitive mode of doing business, and obtained (as the learned, but ungrammatical, say) at that epoch among the tenant-farmers of our provincial counties. It was not so convenient for the creditor, when the time for carrying away the plunder arrived. But there were men who would have made no objection, so why should he?

"So we killed your favourite fox for you, Gillson, at last."

"Yes; but foxes were meant to be killed in that way, though we shan't have a stouter in the gorse, I fancy, in my time," said Tom Gillson, a real friend to fox-hunting, and one of the hardest men in the country. "It was the pace at first that blew him, squire. He'd been breakfasting too, I take it, off some o' the missus's

chickens; she missed four on 'em the next day."

"Then she don't care about his death, at all events."

"Well, she's main fond o' the foxes. She knows one good straight-neck'd 'un is worth a sight o' poultry."

"I've never known a blank in your gorse, Tom, since I was a boy on a pony."

"And I hope you never will, if you live to be a hundred. Hope the bay horse you was riding didn't hurt hisself, sir," turning to Deloraine. "Nasty boggy bottom."

"Well, he did hurt himself, I'm sorry to say. He's not been quite the thing since. And I want to buy one for next season."

"He wants a lady's horse, Gillson. He won't keep so many for himself, nor ride as hard, I'm afraid," said Sir George, cheerfully.

"Oh, that's it, is it, sir? It hasn't made much difference to you, squire. But if you'll bring Mr. Deloraine over to-morrow or next day, I can show him a four-year-old that would suit him or his lady either."

"How are your birds, Barker: pretty good season do you think?"

"Famous, if this weather holds till the twenty-first. That's the day as we count they hatch out. I got some nests hatching at home, Sir George."

"And how are the dogs? Not got rid of the old breed yet?"

"Not yet; but you gentlemen seem to think less about dogs every year. I do think in a year or two you'll be shooting without dogs at all."

"Not I, Barker. I love the sport; and I'd rather kill ten brace to such dogs as yours than forty to none at all. It's a treat to see your young dogs back."

"They do it almost of theirselves. I got two now that have never been in a keeper's hands, and they're so high-bred they want no teaching."

"I'm afraid it's a baddish neighbourhood for poaching," said Joe Phillpot, a fine, handsome young fellow, near the bottom of the table, but whose lungs seemed good enough to make himself heard the length of the room; "and it gets worse. There's a bad lot about D——. I

don't half like that fellow they call the Shaver at the Man-at-Arms. I saw one of our Nethercliffe men coming out, who's as big a rascal as we got in the parish."

"Come, I don't think you've much to complain of, Mr. Phillpot," said Foster. "I can forgive a poacher, when he stops there."

"That's just it, he don't stop there. Look what it leads to: why just look at that affair last year, three of 'em killed: one of 'em a keeper."

"Yes, yes; that's bad enough. But it's hot blood; it's not deliberate murder."

"They go out with guns, and bludgeons, and it's so like deliberate murder that no jury can tell the one from the other, I'm happy to say. But it's your peaceable folk that encourages 'em; talking about love of sport, and all that sort o' thing, which they don't understand."

"Well! there's less crime about Nethercliffe than about any other lordship in this county."

"Always let alone the poaching," said Master Foster, "you're right enough. And I'll tell you what: I've never ridden or driven from here for twenty years, after rent-day, and I have walked

every time from here to beyond Burnham, and never met with any one but a labourer going home from work, or some of the tradesmen's daughters from D——, taking a walk with their sweethearts. And uncommonly pretty girls they are, Mr. Phillpot, I can tell you."

"If you meet with nothing more than a pretty girl or a day-labourer there's not much danger. I've got my receipt in my pocket, and you won't ask for the money again, I know; but I ride to the farm, and I generally carry a whip with a trifle of metal about it when I've anything like that about me. There, I'll lend it you to-day; and don't you try that walking game any more. Why you might be taken ill on the road; and there's tramps about everywhere betimes, though we're pretty free from 'em. But it's the Squire's money as you're playing with, not your own; and you'd better carry my whip to-night, and welcome." Saying which Phillpot helped himself to a good jorum of punch, which was now on the table, and proceeded to light a pipe. "No offence, Sir George. I suppose we may have the usual privilege?"

"Certainly, Joe; I'm going to smoke a cigar

myself, and I see my friend, Deloraine, has lit up already."

Mr. Foster seemed struck with the argument that he was risking another person's money, and made no opposition to accepting the farmer's weapon of defence when the time for parting arrived, though he laughed at the notion of its necessity. Hadn't he travelled that road every year for twenty years on the rent-day, and wasn't he likely to do the same for twenty years to come? Who was to know it, and weren't the days of highway robbery gone by? After which for some time the punch continued to circulate. Conversation got more horsey and agricultural; the Squire's health was drunk, and his friend, and the tenant-farmers of England, and fox-hunting with nine times nine, and Lady Carnaby, and the young Squire; and two very stupid songs were sung; and amid requests for draining-tiles, new gate-posts, a cow-shed, and promises to do everything for everybody, in a dense cloud of smoke, which barely enabled Sir George to see the way out of the room, he and Deloraine took their leave. They were going to take one cup of tea, or perhaps a pipe with

old Master Portman, who had been bailiff and tenant to the grandfather of Sir George, and whose age the next oldest inhabitant put down at a hundred and one, though his memory was impaired by the fact that he himself was close upon ninety-nine.

They had been gone about an hour, and the punch-bowl had been replenished, and the pipes and tobacco had circulated freely, when, in the midst of noisy discussion on top-dressing and dibbling, the slanting rays of a fine sunset warned Mr. Foster that it was half-an-hour later than he thought, and that it was time to be off. He looked round the table; the gills once rosy had become rosier, the eye that had glistened in the morning was now moist with a warmer liquid, and a general tendency to curl in the hair that remained to some, and was exuberant in others, added its persuasive voice to the call of the sun's rays. The agent got on his legs, steady as the legs of the table at which he stood; and, after inviting his friends to make themselves merry, and asking their old friend and neighbour, Mr. Gillson, to take his seat in the chair, he told them that he was anxious to

reach D—— before dark, as he had been reminded that the property he carried was not his own; and though he had travelled the same road on foot for twenty years, he had never been "the worse for liquor or for highwaymen." He was sure he was not the one now, and hoped he might not be the other. He wished them a very good evening; and, detaching his hat from a heap of broad-rims and waggoners, he clutched the whip, which was put into his hand by Joe Phillpot, and set forth on his journey.

The road was as plain and as good as a road need to be. It was a turnpike road, in general use; and three or four hours before this time there would have been some sort of traffic upon it at every five or ten minutes' interval. There was nothing of the sort to be expected now. It was a turnpike road, and until Foster came within a short distance of D——, there was no expectation of his seeing anything but a stray labourer or a waggon. The chances were much against that. He started at a good pace, for he was, as he said, about half-an-hour later than usual. As to reaching D—— by daylight, he must give up all hope of doing so, for the sun

was already behind the trees, and sinking rapidly. He swung his companion lustily to and fro, and felt by the weight that it was a formidable weapon, especially where the assailant had the advantage of planting a downward blow as from horseback. As it was, he never thought for a moment that he should be called upon to prove its effects on foot.

A part of the road passed through what is commonly known as the forest. It had just thus much resemblance to a forest and no more. There was no house within half a mile of it in any direction. The trees and grass came close up to the turnpike without the intervention of hedge or ditch, so that egress or ingress was especially easy. Close to the road the oaks were stunted in height, but broad and large, with the lower branches now full of leaf, and there was an undergrowth of thicket, which made concealment and escape for the moment remarkably facile. It was so tempting a spot for a highway robbery, that it seems impossible to believe that any man could have tempted Providence for twenty years by carrying so much as a pocket knife. The only thing to be said

in favour of Foster's theory was, that he had hitherto accomplished the journey in broad daylight.

But now it was no longer broad daylight. On the contrary, daylight was rapidly retreating before the advance of night; and though darkness was not to be looked for at this season excepting in storm, the part of the road of which we speak was so overhung with branches and foliage as to make everything indistinct for above a quarter of a mile on each side. After that the distinctive features of the forest again disappeared, and a broad, cheerful, and open road led straight to D——.

Mr. Foster had reached this rather gloomy part of the road, and suddenly mindful of the quantity of money he carried about with him, began to whistle. It was not a martial air, but a plaintive little song, which had not the effect of frightening, but rather of attracting, two men who lurked in the neighbourhood.

"Franklin, do you hear that—that's the scoundrel." The speaker was behind a tree within ten paces of the road, and spoke to a companion, kneeling behind a thicket close by.

"You know where to get your horse in case of accident; but there's no fear. I see him now; he's alone. You see that line of willows, back there—the horses are behind the second tree on the left hand side—don't forget. Here he comes." With these last words, Foster reached the spot; and the two men rose and crossed the road, one in front of him, the other behind him.

"Halt!" said Ferrers, who was in front, in a low but firm voice; and it was so utterly unexpected, that Mr. Foster positively forgot his whip, and began to parley.

"Who are you?" said he, in reply to the summons.

"Quick—we know you—out with the money. We have no time for talking. Do you see that?" and he raised a small revolver, on which the agent saw the caps if he saw nothing else.

But now he had had time to collect his senses, for the loss of which the suddenness of the attack may account, and he did what he should have done at first, he raised the trusty farmer's whip and struck a violent blow at Ferrers. At the same moment he was closed with from

behind by Mountjoy, who, if not a powerful man, was as active as a cat. The blow was thus deprived of some of its force; but it was so well aimed, that it brought Gilbert Ferrers to his knees. The pistol remained in his hand; for it had not been intended to use it, excepting in the last extremity. Mountjoy had protested strongly against it, and especially against its being charged; but Ferrers was not a man to undertake an enterprise of any kind by halves. He recovered himself, and seized the whip with his left hand, muttering a threat to Foster, who continued to struggle in the grasp of his companion.

"It's useless; give up the money," said he, as Mountjoy succeeded in tearing open his overcoat; "your life will be safe enough."

But Foster endeavoured to slip from his coat, determining to take his chance of a shot if he could succeed in getting out of their clutches; he was an active fellow, and doubtful of their catching him, or indeed attempting to do so.

At that moment, Mountjoy heard, as he imagined, a sound of horses, and determined

upon bringing the contest to a close. "The butt-end," said he, "quick!" And Ferrers attempted to turn the pistol in his hand; but he had but one at liberty, and meantime the agent seized the weapon, and it went off. The ball passed through the arm of Mountjoy, which dropped, powerless, by his side. The struggle was over; and instead of securing the pocket-book and notes, it became necessary to secure their own safety. They turned to escape, the pistol having fallen to the ground in the consternation of the robbers; but Foster was not so disposed to give up his chance, now that he had one; and, capturing the pistol with one hand, he seized Gilbert Ferrers by the collar with the other. They stood resolutely for a moment, and the odds were certainly against the highwayman, who had no longer possession of the pistol, but only of the hand which held it. Mountjoy was faint from his wound, and leant up against the boll of a tree, unable to escape, and a passive spectator of a robbery which he had planned.

But it was soon to be determined. A sound of galloping horses approached, and in less

than a minute after the report of the pistol, Sir George Carnaby and Deloraine were on the spot. Deloraine jumped from his horse, while Sir George shouted lustily, "Hold him, Foster. What! two of them; and one—why! what's this?" At that moment Mountjoy fainted, and fell with a groan. Deloraine had made short work of Ferrers, and had quickly released Foster's hand.

"You have the pistol, Mr. Foster?" said he, holding Ferrers in a good strong grip that he saw it would be waste of time to contend against.

"Luckily for me, I have," gasped he, as his breath went and came rather more quickly than usual.

"Then see that you hold it at this scoundrel's head. That pistol will save us a great deal of handcuffing; and now let's look at the prisoners." With this he took off the crape mask which concealed Ferrers, but which in the rapidly deepening twilight told him nothing. "What of your man, Carnaby; is he alive or dead?"

"He has only fainted. What are we to do with him here?"

"When he revives, we must put him on one of the horses. It won't be much darker than this at present, and it's only two miles to D——."

"We're more fortunate than I thought," replied Deloraine. "I hear a cart. Now, Mr. Foster, if you'll trust me with the pistol, I think we can manage these fellows."

Truly the rumbling noise of a cart came nearer and nearer, and in a few minutes more an empty waggon, on its way to the town, came up. The waggoner, having heard the account, and having made the acquaintance of so great a man as Sir George Carnaby, surrendered his waggon to the wounded prisoner; and Sir George, having mounted his horse, and seen the prisoner propped upon some empty sacks, took his way by its side.

With regard to Ferrers, there was no difficulty. Foster mounted guard with the pistol on one side, and Deloraine on the other, the waggoner having undertaken to lead the other horse.

In this order they reached D——, and were at once handed over to the police, by their captors, for the night, with a probability of making

their appearance before the magistrates on the morrow.

It was to this eventful meeting of magistrates that Sir George and Deloraine were now gone, and which had occasioned the short note which the latter had sent to Myra. Only one thing of importance remains to be mentioned. When Ferrers made his appearance in the police-station, and a glare of light was thrown upon his face, Deloraine felt strongly impressed with the notion that it was not unknown to him. As the necessary questions proceeded, he endeavoured to call to mind the place and the circumstances connected with him. At first he found it impossible to do so; but as he took the face to pieces, and then began to consider it without the black beard and moustache, which now disguised it, a terrible suspicion crept across him. He was still wavering in a very unhappy state of uncertainty who or what the prisoner Franklin might be, when his doubts were dissolved in a very unexpected manner.

The door of the police-station opened slowly, and a man entered in an inspector's dress as one having authority. The eyes of all turned

towards the door; and the prisoner himself looked round. He had no sooner seen the new arrival, than he became visibly agitated. Inspector Potter—for it was he—had produced a most unpleasant effect upon him; and to judge by his face, Deloraine was no better. If he had any doubts before, he had none now; and he remembered Inspector Potter's words as prophetic—"I wish he was alive, and I'd got the skinning of him, he wouldn't die of drowning the next time; we've evidence enough to give him seven years." He thought it very likely he had, and almost wished they could have hung him; only he was no surer in that case that he would be nearer his happiness then.

When men do not know what to do, they trust to chance; and chance plays a very good hand for them sometimes.

CHAPTER XIV.

GILBERT FERRERS REMOVES AN OBSTACLE MORE EFFECTUALLY THAN GRACEFULLY, AND MYRA REAPS HER REWARD.

AS may be imagined, the discovery thus made by Deloraine caused him considerable perplexity. There are men as passionately and as honourably in love as Deloraine, who would have thought that the concealment of a fact which must overturn all their hopes of happiness was venial; who would have argued with themselves that the happiness of their betrothed, as well as their own, counselled this concealment. There is plenty of honourable love among dishonest men; and it is one of the peculiarities of that passion not always to be debased in proportion

to the *morale* of the patient, but rather in a certain sense to elevate and ennoble him. A very bad man may be very nobly in love, and if he takes the disease rightly, he may be greatly benefited in his general health. Crimes that spring from an absorbing love should be tenderly dealt with and carefully analysed. And so they are; which proves that juries are human, or at least have a strong leaven of humanity in that divine essence with which legislation and experience declares them to be indoctrinated. What, indeed, but this could lead the twelve wonderful men we have so often seen discharging their functions in a court of justice to a right solution of a case of which they knew nothing? What but this could enable a dozen men in buckram, of but indifferent intelligence or industry on their own affairs, to sit out twelve mortal days without flagging on the affairs of another, and for which they are so inadequately paid: for even virtue in this country loves to be viewed by a golden light, when not too strong.

But Deloraine was truly perplexed with his discovery, because he was himself exceedingly in love, and too honourable not to do what he

knew to be right. The right in this case, too, was inevitable, which might have acted upon a less honest mind in a stringent form. Was not Inspector Potter in D——? Did not he know that Franklin and Ferrers was the same person? And whatever might be the result of the examination and committal before the magistrates for highway robbery, could there be any doubt about the identification and the exhibition of the warrant for forgery now or hereafter? Would not the very newsmongers themselves be crying the wonderful escape, resuscitation from death, and capture of Gilbert Ferrers, the bank director, manager, and proprietor of all the valuable and visionary schemes of the last two years? Therefore, if a man were not bound by honesty to tell Myra the truth, he would have been urged by necessity to do so. It was a terrible ordeal to face for both of them, but it must be met.

It was upon some such considerations as these that Deloraine fell asleep. He would go to the Town Hall to-morrow, give his evidence, and return by Burnham to break the news to Myra. It was not a pleasant prospect. He also determined to see Mr. Inspector Potter, and to do

what he could with that gentleman to ward off needless exposure in the neighbourhood of D——; for though Myra's secret had been well enough preserved, it could scarcely be expected that no whispers had been heard; and Deloraine's first object was to save her unnecessary pain. Conjecture has something the advantage of rumour, in that it seldom reaches the person aimed at; and nobody would wish to conjecture much to Myra's discredit, though the world would not have been slow to have repeated what it heard.

When Myra received her note, her lover was on his road. She sat at home, listlessly planning the words in which she was to make shipwreck of his happiness and her own. It seemed easy enough to blurt out the fact that her husband had reappeared; and not so easy that she, the wife of another man, should throw herself on his neck, and weep out a long farewell to all their hopes. If ever there was an excuse for one more method of smoothing her path, it was to be found in Myra's dilemma; but she was not a woman to buy such happiness by such an act of discredit to herself, or disloyalty

to the man who trusted her. She was the wife of a felon, where she had believed herself to be his widow; and though there are some, no doubt, who would wear the willow with a very becoming sadness, none could be found more openly or more honestly to have avowed it than Myra. Widowhood had been worn by her with a reticence becoming the pain with which it was connected, but it had been in no less degree an unmitigated blessing.

When Sir George Carnaby and Deloraine reached the Town Hall of D——, a large, white, offensive-looking building, consisting of a room in which prisoners were tried, and in which county balls were sometimes held, and twenty smaller ones, in which county business was transacted, from which writs, summonses, *fi-fa* and *caca* issued, where jolly dogs were fined for driving upon the footpaths, and poor women and heartless vagabonds were made to meet on equal terms, by the payment of half-a-crown a week from the stronger side, they found vast preparations making for the reception of the magistrates and the conviction of the prisoners. On the latter score they felt no doubt, as the

reports were so far true, that they had been taken red-handed. D——, too, was proud of its virtue, and justly so, except on the score of poaching. As to highway robbery, the good people believed it to be a relic of barbarity, buried with Claude Duval and Jack Sheppard, and not a nineteenth-century crime at all.

In consideration of all which, there was in front of the Town Hall a vast surging crowd of women and children, idle old men and lads, and a miscellaneous lot of artizans and tradesmen's apprentices. It blocked up the doors and the passages to the court. The tradesmen stood about on the steps of their shops, or at their shopfronts, ready for business or pleasure; and even the curate was getting all he could out of the little charity boy at the corner, whom he had caught playing truant in the general *mêlée*. The town was in a great state of excitement, which rose to its height when old Squire Saunders, of Blunderton Park, appeared in his carriage, accompanied by young Lord Goodwood and Mr. Mannington, brother magistrates, whom he had picked up on his road.

As Deloraine passed in, he found his friend,

Mr. Potter, standing in the doorway of one of the rooms which was not in use. The inspector recognised him immediately.

"Hope you're well, sir," said he, touching his hat with one finger; "hardly expected to see you in these parts."

"I dare say not; nor I you for your present purpose."

"Ah!"—and here the inspector laughed jocularly—"you remember what I told you. Well, we heard of him in London only three days ago, and we were put on, and here we have him. I don't know what brought him down here, for we've ascertained that he's a stranger to these parts. I dare say it will all come out, though."

Deloraine could have enlightened Potter, but he did not think it advisable to do so at this moment; so he replied carelessly—

"I suppose you don't particularly care, now that you've got him. He's safe enough for the robbery, and he'll get something very heavy for that."

"It don't seem to me clear what he was about with the pistol. If he brought it himself, and it was him as shot his companion by mistake,

they'll give him—well, it's a bad case—say fourteen or twenty years."

"I'm inclined to think that the discharge of the pistol was accidental. You know in these cases it isn't one man in ten means to commit murder."

"No! you're right there, sir; but they've a sort of indistinct idea of killing somebody, if there's any chance of their being killed or taken themselves; that's what I take to be about the truth of the matter. He don't value life much—neither his own nor other people's. But I suppose it's time we went up-stairs."

"One moment. Do you intend to exhibit your warrant for the forgery at this meeting?" said Deloraine, recurring to the subject most in his mind.

"Can't say exactly, sir; it depends on circumstances. Maybe it won't be necessary here; but in course before his sentence all that must be known, and it'll go very hard with him, I think. But excuse me, sir. You seem very much interested in this case, and you were very curious some time ago to know about his previous escape. Perhaps you've some particular reason——"

"I have no particular reason for shielding Franklin, and shall give the strongest evidence against him. But," said he deliberately, and weighing his words, "if there should be no absolute necessity for mixing up the two cases, and for proving the identity of the man in this neighbourhood, I confess I have family reasons for wishing it to take its course without the mention of the name of Ferrers. I think my friend, Mr. Weyland, would satisfy your scruples."

"Well, sir," said the inspector, "you know best. Happy to oblige any friend of Mr. Weyland; and I really don't know that it's at all necessary, now that we've got him." With which very distinct but conscience-soothing promise to hold back all information till it was wanted, Mr. Potter took his handkerchief from his hat, wiped his head, which stood in need of the attention, and went up-stairs. He was followed by Deloraine, who was accommodated with a seat on the bench.

"Call the prisoners," said the chairman, Squire Saunders; and they were called first by a policeman, then by several women in the crowd, then

by the policeman at the door, and then by the little boys outside.

The magistrates waited a long time, and first one policeman went out and did not return, and then another, and he did not return, and Squire Saunders, of Saunders Park, J.P., became as red as a turkey-cock and exceedingly irate; Lord Goodwood said something unofficially strong of the policemen, and Mr. Mannington inquired of the clerk why things were not better arranged than to keep them there doing nothing. Then there was a surging sort of murmur in the street, and a buzz of voices on the stairs, and the policeman who had been first sent out came back as white as a sheet.

The chief magistrate had begun a harangue with "What is the meaning—" but stopped short for a moment, as he fancied he saw something in the visage of the pallid policeman making his way, above the sea of heads that surrounded him, towards the table.

"Can't come, sir! What do you mean? Doctor, sir! Are the magistrates to be set at nought by the doctor? If the wounded man

can't be moved, why do you not bring up his accomplice? Call Geoffrey Franklin."

"Beg pardon, sir. Geoffroy Franklin is the one as can't come."

"But he must come. It's his duty to come, and yours to bring him."

"If you please, sir——"

"But I don't please——" recommenced Squire Saunders.

"He's dead. He was found dead in his cell when they went to fetch him."

It was true. You might have called Geoffrey Franklin, or Gilbert Ferrers, but he would not have come. He was beyond answering any sound but the last great trumpet-call, when he was to give account of the deeds done in the flesh.

On the coroner's inquest it was admitted that the body was that of Geoffrey Franklin, who had poisoned himself with prussic acid in his cell on the morning of the magistrates' meeting, after a desperate attempt to escape, having been confined there on the previous night; that his name was on the charge-sheet as having attempted to commit a highway robbery with

violence; that the persons of himself and his companion Mountjoy, now under the hands of the parish doctor, and in a fair way, strange to say, of recovering, were but partially searched, owing to the lateness of the hour and other circumstances, one of which was the absence of the local inspector at a statute fair; and that undoubtedly he had the poison about him when placed in the lock-up. "Felo-de-se" was the verdict; and he was condemned to be buried without benefit of clergy, notwithstanding the universality of the proverb, "De mortuis nil nisi bonum."

Inspector Potter kept his word; and it is generally believed to this day in the police force that Gilbert Ferrers was drowned off the coast of France, in an endeavour to escape from two of that intelligent body; the inference being a fair one, from the fact that they could not find him.

The change produced in the feelings of Deloraine by this extraordinary information may be more easily imagined than described. It became not the less necessary to communicate with Myra; but how to tell her? and what to

tell her? and where to begin? were now questions which he asked himself. Sir George Carnaby, as himself a magistrate, remained at D——; while Deloraine, as only a witness to the attack on Foster, was allowed to go about his business, after being bound over in the usual penalties and forms: for Mountjoy still remained to be disposed of.

He rode straight to Burnham, and put up his horse at the village public, the Goat and Compasses, where he had begun to be so far known that the landlady made a point of smiling at him lately, with a sort of consciousness of a mystery, which was embarrassing, to say the least of it. In five minutes more he was in the cottage. Myra jumped up to receive him. His eye at once detected signs of suffering in her pale face and weary eyelids; and taking her fondly between his hands, he pressed his lips upon her forehead, and spoke to her in his usual tone.

"Myra, you look ill; something has happened that I do not know of."

"Something has happened!" said she, still holding his hand in hers.

"That makes you wretched. What is it, Myra? Sit down and tell me."

"There is but one thing that could make me wretched. Can you not guess?"

Deloraine could have guessed, and felt inclined to do so; but he could not feel all Myra's pain, because he knew the solution of the mystery, if it was as he divined, that she had seen him. So he replied to her summons—

"Tell me yourself, darling; if it is a misfortune that affects me, I can bear it better in that way. What is it that makes you sad?"

"Henry, we must part: I have seen my husband! You, too, have something to tell; but it is not so bad as this."

"I, too, have seen Gilbert Ferrers; but——" here he paused a moment.

"Then you know all. We must submit; it is hard to bear; and we need not be as though this had never been. We must still be friends. You will, after a time, grow to be a friend, kind and affectionate, Henry;" and here a few tears dropped from her eyes, which she hid with her hand—"a brother, who will help me in difficulties and protect me in danger; not as you

might have done, nor—nor——" and Myra looked at him deprecatingly. "Not at present; we could neither of us bear that; but later, when the memory of these things is"—she would have said "blotted out," but she knew better, and said—"a little faded; and—and——" and here she broke down in her sickly attempt to look as if the thought was making her happy.

Deloraine looked at her kindly.

"Yes, Myra; that time might come, when we should be but friends; for, if it were necessary to your happiness, I would give up all my own. But you set yourself and me a needless task. That some delay is requisite, right, sacred, is manifest; but shall this dark image come between us for ever? No; rather let us wait—it is but a postponement of our promises; and you shall not have to think so meanly of my love as that it leans on circumstances."

Deloraine began to think that a messenger had been beforehand, and that Gilbert Ferrers' death had been reported. He then remembered that it had scarcely been possible; nor could he in the least comprehend how she knew even of his existence or presence at D——. Still, as

she had admitted that she had seen her husband, she might know something of his progress or designs. He waited, therefore, a few moments, collecting his own thoughts; and then determining that it would be better to bring the thing to a crisis, he said—

"But tell me, Myra, what you do know, and the source of your information."

"I have no information beyond his own. He was here himself, poor, as I believe, and ready for any desperate enterprise. Enough, Henry; he was the same Gilbert Ferrers as of old—wicked, unscrupulous; he would have bartered his own dishonour, and sold his wife for gold. But he is gone now; and, though he has come between us and the happiness of a life, I shall never see him more. Help me to bear my burden, Henry!"

"By sharing it, Myra. You are mistaken."

"Mistaken! Would that I were! I think no man but Gilbert Ferrers could have spoken as he to me. No, not by sharing it. Go and make some other woman happy, as you would have made me; and in after years bring her to be my friend."

"Stay, Myra; you do not know all. You have seen your husband; so have I. You know him to have been here; I know more. I, too, have something to tell you; but when I wrote last night, I did not know what I know now." Deloraine's eyes looked tenderly down on Myra, who was roused into curiosity. "Will you bear, not a disappointment, darling, but a shock? Your husband is—no more!"

Deloraine waited to see the effect. The large eyes opened with a look of incredulity, painful enough; her lips parted; and her cheek, which had begun to be coloured with the excitement of their meeting, became again pale as marble.

"Is that true?" said she, at length, in a low voice.

"It is, Myra; he died this morning. I have just returned from D——. You are mine indeed and in truth."

"You came here to tell me that, Henry?"

"I came here to tell you that. Last night I should have come, but not with that tale."

"And you know what Gilbert Ferrers was; and have given yourself to me, a felon's wife; and now——"

"Yes, Myra; if you had been a thousand times a felon's widow."

But the shock had been too much for Myra; and she, who had borne up bravely against her disappointments with scarcely a tear, was struck down like the life-long prisoner at the Marshalsea with the first prospect of liberty.

She was not long, however, in recovering herself, and then, as they sat in the cottage, Deloraine told her more of her late husband than she had ever known before. He told her gently of his fate, and how in the highwayman Franklin he had recognised Gilbert Ferrers. From the vices of his youth, and the misfortunes of his birth, Deloraine traced his history, and told her how he would have saved her from the treachery of a man already beyond the pale of society by an unpardonable offence, and by an exile imposed by his own father. He told her of the early depravity of his life, of his falsehood and wrong, first to Mathilde, and then to herself; of his double treachery when her generosity once more put it in his power to repay society by reformation; of his public

debasement, of his private meanness. He knew of his forgeries and his escape; and had believed in his death. And now he had been the instrument of his punishment, which, though he would willingly have transferred it to the hands of another, he could not but welcome as the end of his own probation. "I know his father, Myra; an honest-hearted, noble gentleman, whom his birth made a misanthrope, and whose life he has made miserable; and had he lived, it would have been to shed a cloud of deadly sorrow, like an upas tree, on all belonging to him, and to have died leaving behind him an impression of indelible disgrace. We have escaped that, Myra; and Providence has given us a bright prospect of happiness in store." And, as he spoke, Deloraine leant down to her and kissed her again and again, as her tears continued to flow.

"And you have no fears, Henry," she whispered tremblingly; "you are not afraid that any reproach will cling to the name of the man who wedded the wife of a felon."

"The felon's widow dies, Myra, when she becomes an honest gentleman's wife."

And then all her scruples vanished, and she threw herself on the bosom of her betrothed, and wept aloud there; for she knew that nothing on this side of the grave could separate her from her earliest love.

It was a year from this time that Deloraine carried Myra from her aunt's cottage to his own happy home in Ireland. The reception was a cordial one, and amongst the earliest arrivals to greet her were Lord Fitzcourthope and Lady Honoria Berrylands. Lady Catherine was in town. Lord Fitzcourthope was going to be married to a very wealthy manufacturer's only daughter, and Lady Honoria was not. It would be well, therefore, to know and to be on terms of visiting acquaintance with all the good people within reach. No pleasanter house than Deloraine's, during his father's time, ever opened its doors in Ireland; and if Lady Honoria had failed in being its mistress, there could be no reason why she should not be one of its guests. Myra was only too charmed to have the reminiscences of her happiest days brought back to her; and she and her elder foster-sister

became at once and for ever great allies. Lady Catherine never came back from London, so Myra was fain to go and see her in the following season, by which time she too had become the wife of a cavalry officer of magnificent moustachios and prospects, whose acquaintance she had made at her brother's, and who had accomplished her subjugation by his brilliant performance in the Punchestown steeplechase. His pace at the wall carried everything before it, coping stones, the race, and Lady Catherine.

Aunt Treby is still alive and well; and remarks in the vernacular that Myra was a fool to think at all of going to Burnham, as she could have had all she had to leave without it; to which Myra replies that it got her her husband at all events, and that she shall probably now have all her aunt has to leave, because she doesn't want it.

Old Weyland drew up the marriage settlements, and all Myra's old friends and admirers flocked round her in London, and kissed their finger-tips just as if she never had been in retirement at all. This is the sort of thing that

makes decent society so agreeable—an explanation spoils everything.

That accomplished scoundrel, Mr. Mountjoy, is abroad, not so much for his health as for his morals; and Inspector Potter may be seen in the Row any day from twelve to two, on a horse as fat as butter, pretending to be busy, but really taking his pastime in listening to the band and looking at the people. He says Mrs. Deloraine is the prettiest woman there; and I dare to say he is not far wrong. The noble editor of the *Court Journal* made the same remark after the Drawing-room.

A constant visitor at Deloraine's, and now a cheerful and welcome guest, is our old acquaintance, Squire Fetherstone. He has come out of his retirement at the request of Mrs. Deloraine. She knows his history, though he is as yet ignorant of hers; and is unceasing in her gentle efforts to bring back to life qualities that were well-nigh dead, so long had they slumbered, so ruthlessly had they been laid prostrate. She is succeeding in her good work: and when she sent her eldest boy with the nurse to the old squire, he was so flattered, and so overcome,

that he has asked permission to present him with the best pony that Ireland (in other words, the world) could produce, as soon as he shall be able to ride it. On his last visit he did more. He smoked his cigar on the terrace for some minutes in silence, and then stopped.

"Deloraine, this property round here is all entailed?"

"Yes; every shilling. That reminds me——"

"So I thought—reminds you that you will have to do something for the next. Now listen to me: boy or girl, I'll make it mine. If it's the former, I'll make him my heir, if he'll take my name; if it's the latter, I'll leave my money to your wife, and then it will go among the younger children, and, faith, the old name will go to—Well! never mind—my own boy disappointed me."

Deloraine gave the old man his hand, and they walked into the house. And not long after he knew what had become of his boy and his boy's wife too.

The second boy proved to be (as they told me when I reached the Castle the last time) a girl, which is quite as well; so the money will go

to Myra, and be divided equally among the younger children. It is a very good thing, for there's enough for several, and more than enough for one.

Lord Bacon says that "men leave their riches either to their kindred or their friends, and moderate portions prosper best in both."

THE END.

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